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XAMINER

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XAMINER

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B.S. Media Studies, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2015

A Thesis Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing – Fiction

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FADE IN:

EXT. MISSION TEMPLE PARKING LOT - EVENING

The sun begins to disappear behind the old bell tower atop the sandstone colored sanctuary of the New Mission Temple Baptist Church. Above the arched vestibule, the outlines of the letters spelling out *Saint Catherine's Parish* still show through the peeling tan paint on the fascia board.

Across a massive black asphalt, pothole-speckled driveway, the 12 and 13-year-old boys of the Mission Temple track team line up on the badly fading white lines of the 100 meter track. Their coach, DAVE CHAPMAN, writes notes on a clipboard.

"ROCKET" ROWAN BELL does stretching exercises ten feet away from the cluster of boys and the coach. ROCKET is tall, 5 foot 10 inches. He's thin built, agile, and limber. With his feet planted firmly on the asphalt, he lowers himself to a near Chinese split.

WILLIE COLEMAN sits on the ground fixing his worn and tattered sneakers. He slides a cardboard insert from a box of Wheaties around in the left shoe to cover a hole at the ball of the bottom.

PHILLIP BLACKWELL

Man, those sneakers are wrecked.

MICHAEL PARKER

Yeah, dog, them shits is thru.

COACH DAVE

Hey! Chill!

The coach continues writing. WILLIE scowls at PHILLIP and MICHAEL then continues his operation. ROCKET stands up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yo, WILLIE, what size do you wear?

WILLIE COLEMAN

A ten.

MICHAEL PARKER

What? You going shopping for him or somethin'?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'll trade shoes with ya for this run.

(MORE)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
 And, Heckle and Jeckle, I'll bet
 each of you a dollar that I smoke
 your asses.

Willie hands over his damaged sneakers in exchange for
 ROCKET's spotless silver Adidas Duramos.

PHILLIP BLACKWELL
 (Laughing) You might be the *ROCKET*,
 but you gonna fail to launch today,
 brotha. Dollar bet.

MICHAEL PARKER
 (Laughing) Yeah. Houston, we have a
 problem, and it's them shoes, boy.
 I'm in, son.

COACH DAVE
 All right, all right fellas, let's
 line it up.

ROCKET ties the exhausted sneakers on as tight as he can, and
 the boys take to the track.

WILLIE lines up next to ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 (Whispering to WILLIE)
 Dig hard. Don't look back.

WILLIE COLEMAN
 (repeats to himself)
 Dig hard. Don't look back. Dig
 hard. Don't look back...

COACH DAVE
 Runners on your mark.

The boys stoop low with hands on the track.

COACH DAVE (CONT'D)
 Get set!

The boys raise their backs. COACH DAVE fires the blank
 starter pistol, and the boys spring. Rocket bounds furthest
 forward off the line and takes long, smooth strides in the
 leaning sneakers. WILLIE pumps his arms and runs hard,
 staying just behind rocket. MICHAEL, PHILLIP and two other
 boys trail ROCKET by three steps and WILLIE by one.

At the finish, ROCKET crosses four steps ahead of WILLIE and
 6 ahead of the pack.

A second group of boys line up at the start for the next race.

ROCKET walks over to MICHAEL and PHILLIP who are kneeling and catching their breath.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(Slightly winded)
It ain't the shoes, it ain't the
track, it ain't the trash-talk...
It's the heart. You losers owe me a
dollar each.

Rocket walks across the lot towards the annex gymnasium.

Willie walks up and stands over MICHAEL and PHILLIP.

WILLIE COLEMAN
(sneering)
Well, maybe it's the shoes too.

He turns and walks towards the annex.

FADE OUT.

INT. ANNEX GYMNASIUM - LATER

The track team members workout diligently on various weight machines and with free weights. The gym is inadequately lit with old incandescent lighting. Many ceiling tiles are water damaged and some are missing. The seat cushions on various apparatuses are worn and/or ripped. The machine weights make loud clanks as they slam together throughout the space.

ROCKET is face down on the leg-curl machine doing hamstring pulls. COACH DAVE is spotting him with his hand on ROCKET's back, pushing downward just above his tailbone.

On the final two repetitions, COACH DAVE puts his left hand on ROCKET's glutes and his right pushes down on ROCKET's left hamstring. After the reps, ROCKET stands looking at COACH DAVE with a side eye. COACH DAVE stares blankly as ROCKET walks out of the gymnasium. The clanking of weights continue.

EXT. WOHL COMMUNITY TRACK - DAY

TITLE: Saturday's Track Meet

Track and field events are taking place across the dusty, gravel track and in the field grass that is in need of cutting. The scoreboard reads *Calvary 28, Mission 12*. A group of Mission boys stand near the infield fence.

WILLIE COLEMAN

I wonder where ROCKET is. These cats are stomping us. That damned LARRY "SPUTNIK" SPINNER is running circles around our asses.

KEVIN PARKER

Man, I was right there and heard COACH DAVE say, "You're all ass and thighs" while ROCKET was on the leg-curl, then he grabbed his -

WILLIE COLEMAN

- Fool, shut up!

Kevin flinches.

WILLIE COLEMAN (CONT'D)

With yo lyin' ass. COACH DAVE was just spotting ROCKET.

KEVIN PARKER

That's cool. Don't believe me.

On the scoreboard, the final score reads *Calvary 41, Mission 24*, as the boys shake hands in their two moving single file lines.

INT. NEW MISSION TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH - MORNING

The organist fills the sanctuary with rich minor chord progressions. A crowd of about 130 members fill two thirds of the pews in the church sanctuary. On the front row, eleven ladies sit decked out in fine dresses and skirt suits. Some are blue, burgundy, green, pink, and other bright colors. They've matched every accessory of their gaudy ensembles from the ostentatious hats to their spike-heeled shoes.

ROCKET's mother, IRMA-JEAN RAMSEY, sits among the eleven women, rocking back and forth and fanning herself with a hand-held paddle fan that has a picture of PASTOR THOMAS and his family smiling brightly on it.

PASTOR THOMAS stands behind the pulpit and in front of a giant mural of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed Jesus. Christ is depicted with an upward gaze and hands extended towards the vaulted ceiling of the church.

PASTOR THOMAS

There ain't nothin' better than my Jesus.

PARISHIONERS
No sir... Say that... Amen...

IRMA-JEAN RAMSEY
(shouting excitedly)
My Jesus!

She raises her right hand to the sky, waving it like a flag of surrender.

PASTOR THOMAS
He woke me up this morning, and
brought me here safely, so that I
could tell you how much he loves
you.

WILLIE COLEMAN and MICHAEL PARKER are sitting on a pew near the rear of the church.

MICHAEL PARKER
(whispering)
So, where's ROCKET? A no-show at
the track meet and now his mama's
here without him.

WILLIE COLEMAN
(whispering)
I guess at home in Kinloch,
sleeping.

MICHAEL PARKER
I thought he lived in Berkeley.

WILLIE COLEMAN
You know Kinloch folks say they
live in Berkeley so that you won't
look down on them.

PASTOR THOMAS
(Shouting)
Say Thank you, Jesus!

PARISHIONERS
Thank you, Jesus!

PASTOR THOMAS
Thank you, Jesus!

PARISHIONERS
Thank you, Jesus!

The organist glissandos into a vibrant chord, the drummer and bass player kick into a fast and lively fugue, PASTOR THOMAS breaks into a spirited high-step and the parishioners fill the aisles with stomping, dancing, and shouts. A young male parishioner does a back-somersault.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - AFTERNOON

TITLE: Ten Years Later

Old Benton Park West bustles with revitalization and gentrification. Bodegas line both sides of Cherokee Street. ROCKET places a stack of newspapers inside of a lime-green newsstand located on the corner of Cherokee and Iowa, in front of the brilliantly refurbished sandstone facade of Yaqui's Bar and Restaurant. The stand has a large decal that reads *Center Stage - FREE, take one*. As ROCKET is leaving the box, a tan Ford Taurus honks as it passes. The car pulls to the curb.

WILLIE COLEMAN

ROCKET! ROCKET ROWAN BELL! It's me,
WILLIE.

ROCKET approaches the car, and WILLIE hops out.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

What's up, WILLIE?

They shake hands and embrace.

WILLIE COLEMAN

You are what's up, brother. Look at you. Even taller. What are you, about six foot four?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Six-five.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Man, you've filled out too. What are you up to? I haven't seen you since... since that week before the Calvary meet.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah. I stepped off after the little gym thang.

WILLIE COLEMAN

What happened, bruh? KEVIN told us that COACH DAVE said, "You're all ass and thighs," and it got you heated.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

That motherfucker lied, as usual. Remember he would tell us that his daddy went to work at 6 am and didn't get home until 1 am the next morning? Everyday?

WILLIE COLEMAN

Yeah. I told his ass to shut up. I figured he was lying again.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I don't know why we believe bullshit, constantly. That's our biggest downfall.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Whose? Mine and yours?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Black people, homey.

Rocket pauses and looks toward the end of the block.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Anyway, I'm out, bruh. Got papers to distribute.

He hands Willie a copy of the publication.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Nice! A Black society page. Some positivity. That's what's up!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah. Peace, Willie.

ROCKET begins walking away.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Yo, can't we catch up?

ROCKET continues walking west on Cherokee.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm busy, bruh. Maybe some other time.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Rocket! I really want to know
what's been happening with you,
man. Please!

ROCKET turns, looks at his watch, then looks at WILLIE.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'll catch you another time,
WILLIE. For real, bruh.

ROCKET walks to the next corner and places a stack of newspapers into a lime-green newsstand. WILLIE passes him and beeps his horn as he drives down Cherokee. ROCKET doesn't look up.

FADE OUT.

INT. PANERA SOUTH GRAND - LATER

WILLIE sits inside the St. Louis Bread Company, at a corner booth, with a Panini sandwich, and a lemonade. He holds and carefully peruses each page of the *Center Stage* edition that he was handed by ROCKET. The cover of the publication bears a large title in "Apple Chancery" font that reads: *Summer is Here: Lovers are Center Stage*. The headline is over a large photograph of a Black couple in formal wear. The two people are smiling and hugging. A small caption beneath the photograph reads: *Mrs. Dorothy Troupe-Scott and Dr. Everett J Scott, MD*. Photoshopped hearts and flowers frame the couple.

Inside of the edition are 16 photos on each page over two prominent advertisements. As WILLIE turns the pages, he observes the advertisements at the bottom and then visually scans the photos, reading the names under each. He smiles when he sees a photo with the caption: *Mother Mayella Thomas and Reverend Dr. J. L. Thomas*. His face lights up when he looks at the first photo on the third line of page 14. The caption reads: *Mrs. Francine Coleman and Mr. Willie G. Coleman, Sr.*

WILLIE COLEMAN

(whispering)

You go mom and pop.

On page 15, he looks at the advertisement for Yaqui's Bar and Restaurant: *The place where the "progressives" meet and mingle.*

FADE TO:

INT. *CENTER STAGE* OFFICE - EVENING

MARVIN SMITH, owner of *Center Stage*, sits behind his large oak desk in his office pecking away with two fingers on an old relic of a manual typewriter. MARVIN is a 78-year-old, short stature, balding, olive complected, Jewish man.

ROCKET enters the quaint ranch-style home and descends quickly down the basement steps into the office area. Marvin stops typing and leans back in his swiveling leather chair.

MARVIN SMITH

ROCKET, ROCKET, ROCKET. How were last month's pick ups?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Pretty light, MARVIN. I took back about 30 copies at each box on average.

MARVIN SMITH

Seems like you see that as negative.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I do, MARVIN!

MARVIN SMITH

Why?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Because it seems like people just aren't interested in the stories and articles, so they don't pick it up.

MARVIN SMITH

They're not interested in the stories and articles, ROCKET. They're interested in the advertisements. And advertisers are only interested in the readers being interested in the advertisements.

ROCKET sits on a high-backed, gray vinyl chair in front of MARVIN'S desk and reclines back.

MARVIN SMITH (CONT'D)

The writing is an after-thought, ROCKET. It's only there because of the need to fill blank ad space.

(MORE)

MARVIN SMITH (CONT'D)

When you see and understand Black publication to that extent, you'll have a clearer understanding of all print publications.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

So, you're saying that Black people aren't interested in being informed?

MARVIN SMITH

Informed about what? Listen ROCKET, Muckraking was the most informative reporting in print publication history, and it ended in the early 1900s, when advertisers starved certain publications to non-existence in order to protect their political pawns. After that, there was no more news and information, just filler.

Rocket sits up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

You're bull shitting, Marvin! People are getting information. Look at the Black weekly papers, the *St. Louis Advocate* and the *River City Current*.

MARVIN SMITH

Really? Since I was once part owner of the *Advocate*, over twenty years ago, I can tell you with all due certainty and sincerity that people are getting filler, ROCKET. Fluff! That paper couldn't exist if there was ever anything close to *real* information in it.

Rocket wipes his hands down his face, and shakes his head.

MARVIN SMITH (CONT'D)

Don't take it to heart, ROCKET. Wait until you see the pick up on our *Lovers Center Stage* edition. There will not be a single issue left on the racks or in boxes. People love seeing their friends pictured in publications. That's why the *Evening Twist* has such a broad circulation.

(MORE)

MARVIN SMITH (CONT'D)

It's nothing but a mug-shot array that tells who committed what crimes each week, but they sell thousands of issues with that shitty formula. We're doing the community good, Rocket, believe me.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Good is relative, Marvin.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. LOUIS CITY HALL - DAY

ROCKET walks across the marble floor of the City Hall rotunda. AZIZ AJUMA and two other Black men in suits and bow-ties are descending the grand stairwell. AZIZ is a sea salt dark chocolate brown, all the way through his lips, except for the tiny splash of pink where they meet. His eyes are narrow and piercing, giving him somewhat of a menacing look. He wears a black fedora, with an azure blue feather on the left side. His suit is a navy pin-striped, with a pale yellow shirt and a sharp powder blue bow-tie with colorful designs on it.

AZIZ AJUMA

Hey, Black man.

ROCKET continues on his way.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)

(Sternly and louder) Excuse me, Black man!

ROCKET looks in AZIZ's direction.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Are you talking to me?

AZIZ and his two cohorts approach ROCKET. The two smartly suited men flank AZIZ like secret service. One is coffee-brown skinned and the other is a tall, light-skinned fellow. AZIZ addresses ROCKET.

AZIZ AJUMA

Yes sir. I'm AZIZ AJUMA, leader of the St. Louis -

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

- Yo, I know who you are. What can I do for you.

AZIZ AJUMA

You can quit fronting for that Jew
and go to work for a real Black
newspaper.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Fronting?

AZIZ AJUMA

Yes brother. I've known Marvin
Smith since the 1960's when he was
part-owner and selling ads in the
biggest Black paper in this region,
The St. Louis Advocate. He was
intercepting Black money then, and
still does with you as a face for
that White paper. Ninety percent of
Blacks who read it don't know
MARVIN's White, because of the
name, and they've never seen him.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Man, I'm just trying to put
positive information into the
community. That's all.

AZIZ AJUMA

Well, it ain't positive if it's
intercepting money that should be
coming to the community, brother.
Go to work for the *Advocate*, or
help to bring the *Current* back to
its former stature. Stop helping
that Jew to rip off your community.

ROCKET looks befuddled.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)

Assalamu Alaykum, brother. That
means -

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

- Yeah, yeah, peace be upon you,
too, brother...

AZIZ and his friends walk away with an almost military gait.
ROCKET stands a moment, then leaves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CENTER STAGE OFFICE - DAY

MARVIN SMITH

Why would we want to publish a piece about the President of the City Council taking this donation before his vote? Besides, it's two months old, ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Because the \$40,000 donation was given to JENKINS by the union that benefitted most from his yes vote on that project. My source at the union gave me a heads-up and I looked over the President's campaign finance records that just posted today because of quarterly requirements.

MARVIN SMITH

This is a story for the *Current*.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

This is important information for the community, regardless of the source. You're leading this edition with coverage of the *Black Princess Ball*, but you don't see this as more important to the community?

MARVIN SMITH

It'll get covered, ROCKET! The daily or one of the other publications will run it.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

This is *my* story, MARVIN. It's not for them to be the only sources of important information in *my* community. They'll likely pass anyway, because the unions run notices with them.

MARVIN SMITH

It's not for *Center Stage*, either!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Damn, Marvin! I can't do this anymore.

MARVIN SMITH

Do what anymore?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
This filler, bullshit!

ROCKET calms.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Look, Marvin, you've been a great mentor, but there's got to be a source for some real and relevant information for Black folks. We're dying because of the shit that we don't know. I can't just be a front for a Black society page, no more. I'm sorry, old buddy, I'm out.

ROCKET exits. MARVIN sits back, shakes his head, then sits up and returns to typing away on his manual typewriter.

FADE OUT.

INT. THE PRINT SHOP - DAY

ROCKET stands at the receiving counter of the busy print shop. There are stacks of boxes atop the crowded counter. A young female clerk is sorting through a pile of receipts.

A young man wheels a dolly with a stack of four boxes around the counter and stands it next to ROCKET. On the top of the boxes is a newsletter titled, *The Rocket Report*. The headline reads: *White Labor Buys Black City Council President's Vote for \$40,000*. ROCKET examines the front and back of the document, smiling.

CLERK
That's 5,000 copies at 10 cents per, with tax. That'll be \$541.16.

Rocket hands the clerk a credit card and completes the purchase. The young man follows ROCKET, wheeling the dolly though the door.

CUT TO:

INT. YAQUI'S - EVENING

ROCKET sits at the bar of the crowded pizzeria sipping on a glass of Hennessy on the rocks. At the end of the bar is a light-skinned, tall, black man, dressed in a dapper grey suit staring at ROCKET. ROCKET watches the man out of the corner of his eye. The gentleman gets up and approaches ROCKET. ROCKET stands up defensively as the figure gets within five feet.

DAPPER MAN
Peace, brother.

ROCKET stands reticent.

DAPPER MAN (CONT'D)
Minister Aziz Ajuma would like to meet with you. Here's his information. The Mosque is on North Grand.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What does he want to meet with me about?

DAPPER MAN
That's between you and the Minister, Black man.

CUT TO:

INT. MUHAMMAD MOSQUE #20 - DAY

ROCKET walks through the tall Mosque doors into the ornate sanctuary. There are high stain-glass windows, colorful large crystal chandeliers and a giant image of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad behind the pulpit. Minister AZIZ AJUMA is standing under the image. AZIZ stretches his arms outward in welcome.

AZIZ AJUMA
Assalamu Alaykum, brother Rowan X.

As ROCKET approaches AZIZ embraces him.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
How are you, Minister?

AZIZ AJUMA
Please, call me AZIZ. I'm happy that you could come to meet with me. Come with me to my office.

The two leave through a hidden door cut into the left side bottom of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's image.

Aziz sits down behind a grand, polished oak desk. Rocket sits in a leather lounge at the side of the desk.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)
So, you took my advice to heart, huh brother Rowan X?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

What is with this *Rowan X*? You can call me ROCKET. That's what my friends call me.

AZIZ AJUMA

But your mama named you Rowan, and Bell is your slave name. We call you what suits your mother and the X holds the place for the name that you will gain after a pilgrimage to Mecca.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Am I here to be recruited into the Nation of Islam?

AZIZ AJUMA

On the contrary, brother. We do not recruit. We let the truth draw our members. You will find it soon enough. In the meantime, it's time to help you put forth a publication that truly informs our people. Your newsletter was brilliant. How did you pay for it?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Out of pocket.

AZIZ AJUMA

Then you will go broke. I want to help you draw in the necessary advertisement and notice placements so that you can thrive and spread your beautiful truth.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

So, you weren't put off by me going after the Council President? He's a Black man, you know.

AZIZ AJUMA

No, no, no! My dear brother. The councilman is not a Black man. He hasn't been for a long time now. He is a House Negro. You must learn the difference. Our St. Louis Black so-called "leadership" is a collective of House Negroes. This is where your publication will define itself and do the most good.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 So how do you propose that I get
 advertisements and placements if
 I'm attacking Black so-called
 "leadership."

AZIZ AJUMA
 You let me handle that.

AZIZ picks up his phone and speed dials.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)
 Hello, Cynthia, please connect me
 with the big man.

AZIZ smiles and winks at ROCKET.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)
 Albert! Aziz here. Listen, aren't
 you running a summer youth program
 this year?

AZIZ nods.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)
 I wouldn't know it based on
 advertisement. Listen, I've got a
 young brother with a new
 publication here that will be the
 first state certified Minority
 Business Enterprise publication in
 Missouri. I'd like to see some
 notices run with him.

Aziz smiles and writes on a tablet. He shows it to ROCKET. It
 reads: *He'll run a half-page at \$750 a month for three*
months. ROCKET eyes bulge and a huge smile overtakes his
 face.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)
 Thank you, Albert.

Aziz hangs up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 Wow! \$2,250 with one phone call?

AZIZ AJUMA
 Brother, Rowan X, I'll be making
 several calls like this. You need
 to go to the state office downtown
 and apply for your Minority
 Business Certification.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
How will I be the first MBE
publication when there are five
Black publications already
existing?

AZIZ AJUMA
First of all, you must stop
throwing around the term "Black" as
if it applies to everyone and
everything with melanin. Those are
"Negro" publications, not Black. A
firm must be owned 51% by a
minority to be certified. Since
none of them are certified, does it
not make you wonder *Who really owns
these papers?*

ROCKET looks on pensively.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)
Just make sure that you get
certified. We know who owns this
publication.

AZIZ smiles wide. ROCKET eyes dart back and forth.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - DAY

ROCKET places a stack of two-hundred papers in a wire
newsstand inside the door of Yaqui's. He walks across the
floor, through the lunch crowd, towards the main bar with a
small stack of editions in his hand.

Willie springs up from a table in ROCKET'S path.

WILLIE COLEMAN
ROCKET! Bruh! It's great to see you
again.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What's up WILLIE? How are you?

WILLIE COLEMAN
Great! Thanks. Come sit down with
me.

ROCKET looks toward the door.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I'm busy distributing, bruh.

He hands WILLIE an edition of his newspaper. WILLIE smiles wide.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Is this yours?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yep. Well, mostly...

WILLIE COLEMAN
Wow! This is amazing. Come on, man,
sit with me so that we can catch
up.

Rocket looks towards the door again, then looks around the room.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
All right. I'll hang for a few, but
I've still got work to do.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Yeah, yeah! I'll help you
distribute, if you want me to.

The two sit down at WILLIE's table where he's having a meal.

WILLIE COLEMAN (CONT'D)
(smiling)
I thought I'd have seen you in the
Olympics for the 100 meter dash, by
now.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I went to Lindenwood U on a track
scholarship. Studied
communications. Freshmen year, I
blew a hip tendon. I had to have
surgery and dropped out. A friend
of mine on the track team, a Jewish
cat, was in my writing class. He
introduced me to his pops, Marvin
Smith, the owner of *Center Stage* -

WILLIE COLEMAN
- Wait a minute. Marvin Smith is
Jewish? *White*?

Rocket looks at WILLIE with a look of contempt.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
So I learned the newspaper business
through that society page.
(MORE)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

I also married Lisa Fuentes after leaving school.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Oh my god! You married Lisa from New Mission Temple? Now I understand why she always seemed mad at you when we were kids.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

They start young, bruh, and never let that shit go.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Clearly.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Anyway, when the time came that I felt like I wanted to give a little more hard news and information to the community, I launched the Xaminer.

WILLIE looks over the publication. Across the top of the front page is the word "Xaminer." The steel-blade colored letter "X" of the word is followed by the letters "a-m-i-n-e-r" in red with green outline. The title is incased in a black text box.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Wow! That's striking masthead, ROCKET. This is a beautiful design and layout.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thanks, bruh. So how about you? What have you been up to for the past ten years? Are you married?

WILLIE COLEMAN

Nope. Haven't found anyone who hates me enough yet.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Riiight...

WILLIE COLEMAN

I graduated "*the other LU*" last month: BIG LINCOLN UNIVERSITY! Got my Bachelor of Music Ed. I'm Going to teach a couple years then go for a masters.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Damn! Nice, WILLIE.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Yeah, man. Got a second interview
for a job in Ferguson-Florissant
tomorrow. It's looking good.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's what's up!

ROCKET and WILLIE slap a high-five over the table.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Anyway, bruh, I'm diggin' this
photo montage that you've got here.

He looks over the four photos and captions on the front page
from top left to bottom right.

WILLIE COLEMAN (CONT'D)
Whoa! *The NAACP Sells Out the
Community on Federal Construction
Project.* Damn! Never seen anybody
call out the NAACP before. You're
on new territory for sure.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yeah, whatever. Fuck those "Colored
People." They don't give a damn
about Black people. They're all
about that White money.

WILLIE COLEMAN
(laughing).

An attractive waitress comes over to the table. Her badge
reads, *Kimberly*.

WAITRESS
Can I get you anything?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
No thanks, Kim. I'll just be here a
minute.

WAITRESS
Well, if you stay longer and need
anything, let me know.

She smiles at ROCKET and walks away. WILLIE grins, his eyes
light up, and he winks at ROCKET.

WILLIE COLEMAN

You got that charm, bruh. Mine is more like raw animal magnetism. You'll see it manifest. Keep watching.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(laughing)

Yeah, right, fool. Whatever.

WILLIE flips through the pages of the *Xaminer*.

WILLIE COLEMAN

You've got some nice advertisement here, ROCKET. Surprised that you could get these ads, with your calling out the NAACP.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I've got friends, bruh. They got me the hook-up. Plus my paper is the only state certified Minority Business Enterprise publication in Missouri, so I get the benefit of the minority designated state placements.

WILLIE COLEMAN

You mean none of the other five Black publications are certified?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Those are "Negro" publications, WILLIE, not Black. There's a difference. Makes you wonder who actually owns them, right?.

ROCKET takes some fries off of WILLIE'S plate and stuffs them in his mouth.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Anyway. Dig the newspaper, and I've gotta roll, son.

ROCKET stands up to leave. WILLIE gets up after him.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Wait a minute, ROCKET. Let me help you distribute. I was serious about that.

INT. ROCKET'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

ROCKET drives slowly west on Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd., near Sarah Ave. WILLIE rides in his passenger seat. The store fronts on both sides of the street are boarded up except for an occasional hole-in-the-wall barber shop, beauty salon, or liquor store. The street is largely in ruin. They drive past a homeless man lying on the sidewalk with his head propped on the stoop of a burned out market. A pack of stray dogs run across a barren lot. Trash, filth, and debris decorate the devastated landscape.

ROCKET and WILLIE both look on with somber expressions.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

How in the Hell do they call it
Black "leadership" when this is how
we livin'?

Two young Black men, both in sagging pants, large shirts, and red ball caps are standing on the corner of MLK and Kennerly. A silver Honda Accord drives up to them, and one of the young men walks up to the passenger side window. As ROCKET drives past the vehicle, he and WILLIE notice that there is a young White male driving and with a young White female passenger.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

In the middle of the fucking day.

ROCKET shakes his head.

WILLIE COLEMAN

I guess that I can get more of a
sense of your outrage, but calling
these organizations out instead of
just -

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

- Just what, WILLIE? Talking to
them behind closed doors, so that
they can invite me into the hustle
and keep the shit going? Fuck that!
That's why we've been on this
course since the Civil Rights "Act"
was passed. I emphasize "Act"
because that's what it was, bruh.
For every right that was granted
Blacks, there was a loophole
created to make certain that no
gains would ever be made.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Damn, homie! You sound like you were studying Black philosophy instead of communications.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I got eyes and ears, WILLIE, and I keep them wide open at all times.

ROCKET pulls the truck over at MLK and Belt St., in front of the Myrtle Hilliard Neighborhood Clinic. The brown brick building is strikingly pristine and seemingly out of place in its surroundings. The two get out of the truck, ROCKET grabs a stack of 200 papers from the truck bed, and they walk into the front doors of the clinic. ROCKET places the stack on a wire rack in the foyer. From two other racks in the area ROCKET picks up a *River City Current* and a *St. Louis Advocate*.

WILLIE COLEMAN

So, how many locations are you circulating to?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Just 47 throughout the city and county, so far. I've also been building a strong Internet presence among the younger readers and the political crowd.

WILLIE COLEMAN

That's the way to go, ROCKET. Social media and video news is what our generation uses. That's how me and my friends get our news and stay informed.

They get back in the truck and continue west on MLK.

CUT TO:

INT. MUHAMMAD MOSQUE #20/AZIZ'S OFFICE - EVENING

AZIZ sits behind his desk. ROCKET hands AZIZ several \$100 dollar bills and sits in the leather lounge.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

That's one-third of the ad revenues from the four placements that you brought in.

AZIZ AJUMA

Thank you, brother Rowan X. Our publication is on its way to being a beacon in this dank, dark, murky swamp that has existed as our reality. The people's information has been all lies. They are taking to this truth like a breath of fresh air. I've had numerous calls praising your insight.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

It's good to know that people are digging being more informed.

AZIZ AJUMA

In the next edition. I need you to run a story on the program director at Freedom House After School Program. He's been giving one of my Nation brothers that works there a bit of a tough time.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

So, you want me to run an article that in some way disparages his leadership?

AZIZ AJUMA

Yes. You can run it under my name as my pick for a "Community Stooge."

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Like a guest columnist, huh?

AZIZ AJUMA

Yes. That would be perfect.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

All right. That's cool. I'll run it as a guest editorial and invite others to submit pieces about our "leaders" who are failing us.

AZIZ AJUMA

Rocket, we are on our way to being the new voice for this community. The *Current* and the *Advocate* will have to try to keep up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

We'll never see the revenue that they see, with them serving "the master" so faithfully.

AZIZ AJUMA

That doesn't matter. We will have the people behind us. With that, we can leverage further funds. Just stay true.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm down.

AZIZ and ROCKET stand. AZIZ gets rigid, and snaps a crisp military salute to ROCKET. ROCKET returns a less snappy salute.

AZIZ AJUMA

You'll work on it, brother.

He shakes ROCKET'S hand and embraces him.

AZIZ AJUMA (CONT'D)

We're on our way, Rowan X. Stay up, Black man.

Rowan leaves the office and Aziz returns to his chair behind his desk, reclines, puts his feet on the desk, folds his hands, and smiles like a baller.

CUT TO:

INT. NAACP CITY HEADQUARTERS - EVENING

BUFORD CARLSON, the president of the NAACP sits at the head of an elegant 12-foot mahogany table. Around the table are five other Black men, including: CARL JENKINS (president of the City Council), MICHAEL LAYTON (CEO of Riteway Markets), ARNOLD DOTSON (community liaison for the mayor of St. Louis), and RALPH NICHOLS (President of the Urban League).

BUFORD CARLSON

It seems that we have a shit disturber attempting to besmirch the good names of Black leadership.

RALPH NICHOLS

I don't know about that, but he certainly seems intent on reporting things that are perceived as negative.

MICHAEL LAYTON
(laughing)
Hell, he's just telling the truth.

The others sneer.

MICHAEL LAYTON (CONT'D)
Don't worry though. I'll never put
an ad in that rag.

BUFORD CARLSON
That's a commitment that we need to
secure with all of our supporting
businesses and agencies across this
city. ARNOLD, he's got a notice
running from parks. Can you get the
mayor to shut that down?

ARNOLD DOTSON
I'll see about doing that.

CARL JENKINS
Yeah. Let's shut his ass down
before he can get going good. Teach
that bastard a lesson.

RALPH NICHOLS
Remember what happened to the *River
City Current* when they thought they
were going to be this *Independent
voice of the community*. They're
still trying to recover.

BUFORD CARLSON
Well, we don't even want this
motherfucker to be trying to
recover. We want his ass shut down.
Let's get on top of this.

RALPH NICHOLS
Agreed.

CARL JENKINS
Absolutely.

ARNOLD DOTSON
I'll check on our end.

RALPH NICHOLS
I'm with you.

BUFORD CARLSON
Thank you, gentlemen.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ROCKET and LISA are making love. Her light tan skin glistens in contrast to his milk chocolate brown. She rides him, pushing back her dark Brunette hair.

LISA
Aye, poppi. Si, si, siiiii!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROCKET and Lisa lay on their backs. Her head rests on his left arm.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I still love it when you speak Spanish, doll.

LISA
I know it, baby. That's why I do it.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL AND LISA
(Laughing)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
AZIZ wants me to write an article under his name. I guess he wants to go after a few of his enemies with the paper.

LISA sits up and looks at ROCKET scornfully.

LISA
(Bitterly admonishing)
ROWAN, I really don't want you involved with that minister, that *hijo de puta*. Some people might feel that he does a lot of positive things for the community, but most know that he uses people for his own gains and discards them like trash.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm just running a guest editorial for him, Lisa. Newspapers have them all of the time.

LISA

First of all, you said he wants *you* to write this "guest editorial?"

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah, doll, under his name.

LISA

Do you know why he has never had a "guest editorial" in the *Advocate* or *CURRENT*?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

No.

LISA

Probably because they wouldn't write it for him. He's using you, ROWAN.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

He brought in four nice ads, Lisa. I gave him his 1/3 of the ad revenue. That's standard commission for an ad manager. Writing an article under his name is not being used. *His* name is on it.

LISA

We'll see, ROWAN. I don't like this bullshit, and I don't like AZIZ AJUMA. If this comes back on us in any harmful way -

ROCKET sits up quickly.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(Agitated)

- Lisa! Stop!

Lisa rolls over with her back to ROCKET. He leans gently to her placing his cheek against hers.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

(Relaxing his tone)

Don't worry, baby.

LISA turns her head upward. ROCKET kisses her gently on the lips three times, softly.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
It'll be fine, beautiful. I
promise.

Lisa's frown gives way to a reluctant half smile. They kiss again.

CUT TO:

EXT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - DAY

The Xaminer sits open to page three on the sidewalk table where a young White male patron and an Asian female sit sipping green tea with mint. An unflattering picture of a disheveled EVERETT BAKER, program director at Freedom House, is positioned under the headline *Community Stooge*. The young man is reading the article. A young White woman with blue hair, a septum piercing, and wearing a tie-dyed sundress comes out of Yaqui's with an Xaminer folded in her left hand. She walks towards Iowa Street.

CUT TO:

INT. MUHAMMAD MOSQUE #20 - EVENING

AZIZ sits on the front pew in the sanctuary of the mosque facing the giant image of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. ROCKET walks down the aisle of the sanctuary towards AZIZ. AZIZ hears the footsteps, but continues facing the mural.

AZIZ AJUMA
You are masterful with a pen,
brother Rowan X. Your approach to
that article was brilliant.

Rocket walks up and sits down next to AZIZ.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Well, your Nation brother, ALI
HAMAAN gave me the insight. He said
the young brothers in the program
don't like BAKER as a leader, so it
was easy to hit him with their
quotes. It doesn't get any hotter
or real than from the mouths of the
kids.

AZIZ AJUMA

Exceptional work, brother. Listen, a source of mine has informed me that the "leadership" are out to shut you down. The NAACP, Urban League, and others want you closed.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Damn! What can they do?

AZIZ AJUMA

What they do to all publications that buck their stature, take away their advertising and starve them out of existence. But, you have some protection. The ads that I gather will weather the storm. They won't turn on me. Since you certified as a Minority Business Enterprise, as I directed, your state placements are safe. As far as your revenue, although it's limited, it's safe. You're bulletproof in that regard. I just needed to give you a heads up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I appreciate it, brother Minister.

ROCKET looks up at the Honorable Elijah Muhammad as AZIZ does.

AZIZ AJUMA

For our next edition, I need a positive story about brother Yusef 7X, the leader of the Moorish Science Temple. Under your own name would be great. You can interview him, get some background. Let people know of the community hero that he is.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Sounds easy enough. If you feel that he's a positive force, I can fill in the rest.

AZIZ AJUMA

He's a good brother. Also, in the edition, under my name, run a story about OLIVER RILES, the PR person for the *Evening Twist*. Call the article, *The Punk of the Month*.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
You're going alienate that LGBTQ
community?

AZIZ AJUMA
Not necessarily. He's well known to
be a notorious sodomite, however,
if you call him a "punk" it could
mean thug or gay. The gays don't
like RILES, anyway. He threatens
the White business community with
turning the Black community against
them, and threatens the Black
community with keeping White money
away. I despise that traitorous
dog. Make it a strong rebuke of
that lowlife Negro.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I got you, brother Minister.

The two shake hands and stand. ROCKET heads down the center
aisle to exit the sanctuary. AZIZ heads for his office.
ROCKET turns.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Brother Minister, may I ask you
something?

AZIZ AJUMA
Of course, brother ROWAN X.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Why have you never had the *Advocate*
or the *Current* publish anything
from you.

AZIZ AJUMA
Brother ROWAN X, those weak Negroes
are not like you. On a strong Black
scale of 1 to 10, their publishers
are about a two, maybe two and a
half. Three at best. You are an
eleven, brother. Remember that.
Assalamualaikum!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Wa alaykumu as-salam, sir!

The two continue in their opposite directions.

CUT TO:

INT. A-CUT-ABOVE BARBER SHOP - AFTERNOON

Rocket sits on a barber's chair having his short Afro trimmed by his barber, MALACHI. The shop has four barber chairs, all with gentlemen being worked on. There are folding chairs for waiting along one wall of the narrow shop. A FATHER waits with his two young boys, about 7 and 11 years old. An ELDERLY white-haired (Afro), light-skinned gentleman waits as well. He's 80 years old, wearing navy-blue dockets, a light blue Ralph Lauren Polo shirt, and tan loafers. He has his legs crossed and is reading the *Xaminer*. The news at noon plays quietly on the flat screen television mounted in the corner of the shop.

MALACHI

Man ROCKET you are getting in the ass of these fools with that paper.

BARBER 2

Looks like you've got the blessings of the Nation of Islam. That's pretty strong, brother. Nobody fucks with AZIZ or the Nation.

BARBER 2 CLIENT

I don't know, man. Them Nation boys seem pretty seedy. Might not be good to be involved with them. A lot of ex-felons in that lot.

He attempts to look around the room without moving his head from grip of BARBER 2.

BARBER 2 CLIENT (CONT'D)

Shit! Let me shut up. Any bow-ties in here?

CROWD

(laughter)

BARBER 3

Yeah, man, from what I hear, the *Current* and the *Advocate* don't fuck with Aziz. He's too hot and controversial.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

They're scared he'll make their White ad money walk away.

The ELDERLY man leans forward in his chair, and lowers the *Xaminer* that he's reading. He's directly in front of ROCKET. He looks ROCKET in his eyes.

ELDERLY

Young man, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your courage in bringing truth to this community. There is nothing like the truth. It washes over you like a warm healing ray of sun. You've touched on that young man. Keep it up, for the sake of the community. You are a beacon, young brother.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thank you, sir. I'll keep it up as long as there's money coming in. If I ever get cut off, it is what it is.

MALACHI

Now, that's real talk, brother.

Rocket looks at the television screen.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yo, hold up! Turn up the T.V. There's something on about the police chief.

MALACHI takes the remote and turns the television up loud.

(A scene within the scene) - CHIEF ROGER NORVEL approaches a crowd of reporters with microphones in hand.

INTERVIEWER

Chief, can you tell us what transpired?

CHIEF

Well the mayor and I seem to be at an impasse on the promotions. I'm not willing to promote from a list that has rendered such a racially one-sided result.

INTERVIEWER 2

Well Chief, everyone has the same opportunity to score well on the test.

CHIEF

That's not necessarily true.

INTERVIEWER 3

Can you expand on that.

CHIEF
That's all I have to say.

The CHIEF walks away, being followed by reporters.

REPORTERS
(yelling questions)
Chief! Chief!

MALACHI turns the television down with the remote.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Wow! The Chief is taking a Hell of
a stance.

BARBER 2
MAYOR SEAN HENSON is gonna get rid
of that brother. That racist ain't
gonna put up with that uppity bull
shit.

BARBER 2 CLIENT
That's right.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. LOUIS CITY HALL - DAY

A crowd of protestors are gathered outside of City Hall. Signs reading: *HENSON must go*, and *Don't give in CHIEF NORVEL* are among numerous others that call for the resignation of the MAYOR and support for the CHIEF. Seventy percent of the protestors are Black. Others are largely Hispanic with some Whites and others. ROCKET stands close to a podium that is set atop a landing on the steps of the building. He has his camera on a tripod taking pictures and video of the protestors and the REVEREND MARSHALL COOLEY who's at the podium. Other reporters are also gathered around the podium near ROCKET. WILLIE approaches the scene and walks over to ROCKET.

WILLIE COLEMAN
ROCKET! How have you been?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I've been well, WILLIE. What about
yourself?

ROCKET looks through his viewfinder, pans left and right, and continues taking photos and video of the scene as WILLIE stands next to him.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Wonderful! I landed the job in the Ferguson-Florissant School District. I'm the band director for the McCluer South Middle School.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Congratulations, Willie!

WILLIE COLEMAN

Thanks, bruh. I've been keeping up with the *Xaminer*. You and AZIZ really keep things hot out here. Speaking of hot, where are AZIZ and the Nation of Islam brothers. They are typically the first to line up to call out the White man.

ROCKET takes his eyes away from the viewfinder and looks around carefully.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm not sure. Fashionably late, grand entrance. Who knows?

WILLIE COLEMAN

Yeah. You may be right. But where are the Black political leaders? And I would have expected more clergy than just COOLEY.

REVEREND MARSHALL COOLEY taps the microphone on the podium three times. Three loud deep pitched knocks resonate from two large speakers followed by feedback that make most in the crowd cover their ears. A young man adjusts the volume on a sound board. ROCKET sets his camera focus on the REVEREND and presses the video record button.

REVEREND MARSHALL COOLEY

We must stand together and not allow the mayor to pressure the city's first Black police chief to do a deed that will set our community back forty years.

CROWD

Yes! Amen. Speak!

ROCKET looks around as the REVEREND speaks. Across the six lanes of Tucker Avenue, ROCKET notices a black BMW with tinted windows that looks like AZIZ's car. The drivers window lowers half way.

REVEREND MARSHALL COOLEY
So we must fight City Hall for the
sake of our progress.

CROWD
(cheering)

ROCKET pans his camera around and focuses on the BMW. He
zooms all the way in. ROCKET sees in the viewfinder that it
is AZIZ. The driver window raises and the BMW pulls away.

WILLIE COLEMAN
No Nation of Islam. That's
interesting.

ROCKET nods and begins breaking down his equipment.

CROWD
(chanting)
Turn back progress, Hell No! Mayor
HENSON's got to go! Turn back
progress, Hell No! Mayor HENSON's
got to go! ...

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S TRUCK - MORNING

ROCKET is driving past Forest Park on Lindell Blvd. His cell
phone rings. AZIZ's name pops up on the screen. ROCKET
activates the hands-free system.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Brother Minister, what can I do for
you?

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O.)
Brother ROWAN X, I'll not be having
anything run with my name this
month.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Why is that?

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O.)
The Fruit of Islam are concerned
that I'm keeping us out in the
public's eye too much. They've
asked me to refrain for a bit.
Also, I'll be traveling to the
Middle-East for a couple of months,
so I'll be inaccessible.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I see. Your presence in the paper actually boosts the stature of the Nation of Islam in the eyes of the general public. It would seem like the Fruit of Islam would want that most of all. Especially since you've never had a press presence in the community through the *Advocate* or the *Current*.

AZIZ AJUMA

(sternly)

Just do as I instruct and keep my name out. Clear, brother ROWAN X?

ROCKET looks startled by the tone.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(timidly)

Yeah. I'm clear, brother Minister.

Aziz disconnects. ROCKET turns left onto Kingshighway Blvd.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

LISA sits at the end of the couch with her legs underneath her, looking at and fiddling with an iPad in a leopard spotted case. ROCKET sits in the center of the couch watching the local evening news.

NEWS ANCHOR

We now take you live to the mayor's news conference.

Lisa sets the iPad flat on her lap and looks up at the television.

(A scene within a scene) MAYOR SEAN HENSON stands behind a bank of microphones. Behind the mayor is a diverse collection of people, and among them is BUFORD CARLSON of the NAACP. Rocket sits forward staring angrily at the screen.

MAYOR SEAN HENSON

The director of personnel, JOSHUA CLEMENS, has decided to demote CHIEF ROGER NORVEL, effective at 5 pm today.

(MORE)

MAYOR SEAN HENSON (CONT'D)

We will be seeking a worthy candidate to fill the position immediately.

INTERVIEWER 1

MAYOR HENSON, DIRECTOR JOSHUA CLEMENS was only appointed by you three weeks ago. He's never managed more than 3 employees in his former position as community liaison. Now he's managing over 1,100. Do you think that this sort of decision could be effectively made by someone with such limited experience?

MAYOR SEAN HENSON

DIRECTOR CLEMENS assures me that he gave this decision careful consideration, and he has my absolute confidence. This decision was not made in a vacuum. I spoke with members of the Black clergy coalition, as well as Black political and community leaders. I've concluded that the decision would be supported.

ROCKET mutes the television. LISA looks at ROCKET expectedly.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Not only did the mayor set the Black community back by forty years, he used a nearly 150-year-old tactic to do it.

LISA

What tactic?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Appointing CLEMENS and having him demote the chief is just like the slave master having the house Negro to punish the field Negro, Lisa. It's to divide the race. Couple that with the fact that the MAYOR insulated himself with Black clergy, political, and community leadership, and he's got a free reign to do whatever he wants to any Black that he chooses. Those fucking sell-outs.

LISA

So, what do you think your buddy
AZIZ will do? He seems to be M.I.A.
All of a sudden.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I don't know, love. He and the
Nation are laying low for a while,
and he's traveling in the Middle-
East.

LISA

What? That sounds like some shady
shit to me, ROWAN.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Whatever it sounds like, Lisa, it's
time for JOSHUA CLEMENS to be
exposed for the house Negro that he
is.

CUT TO:

INT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - DAY

ROCKET places a stack of three hundred papers on the wire rack inside of the door of Yaqui's. The edition has a 4-photo and caption array under the distinctive *Xaminer* masthead. Top left is a photo of CHIEF ROGER NORVEL over the caption: *Hail to the Chief!* At top right is a photo of MAYOR SEAN HENSON over the caption: *St. Louis - The Henson Plantation.* At bottom left is a photo of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Over the caption: *More than 40 years of Stagnation.* At bottom right is a photo of Personnel Director JOSHUA CLEMENS'S head superimposed on the body of a slave buck-dancer, over the caption: *House Negro of the Month.*

Rocket stands in the entryway of Yaqui's and looks over *The St. Louis Advocate*. A young White man walks into the entryway from the street. He looks over the front page of the *Xaminer*. His eyes get wide as he peruses the photos. He laughs softly and takes a paper with him. A young White woman comes out of the restaurant and into the entryway. She grabs an *Xaminer* enthusiastically and re-enters the restaurant. ROCKET exits the entryway.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S TRUCK - LATER

ROCKET is driving on Page Avenue through the municipality of Pagedale. His cell phone rings. He doesn't recognize the number. He activates the hands free system.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
This is ROCKET.

WILLIE COLEMAN (V.O.)
ROCKET, this is WILLIE. I'm at Yaquis. Where are the new editions of the Xaminer?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
In the wire rack.

WILLIE COLEMAN (V.O.)
It's empty!

ROCKET pulls over to the side of the road.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What do you mean, empty? I put 300 copies in the rack about three hours ago.

WILLIE COLEMAN (V.O.)
Brother, it's empty. I do see copies in the hands of some folks. That's the only way that I knew that you might have delivered.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
All 300 copies couldn't have been picked up in just three hours. I'll have to check with JOEY MARZETTI. He owns Yaqui's. I'll ask if he saw the paper being picked up like crazy. Damn! Good lookin' out, WILLIE.

WILLIE COLEMAN (V.O.)
It's all good, chief.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
If you're around, I'm gonna be back at Yaqui's by nine. Maybe we can get a late bite and have a drink.

WILLIE COLEMAN (V.O.)
Bruh, this joint is crawling with fly honeys. Don't worry, old WILLIE'S staying put.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(chuckling)
See you at around nine, cowboy.

WILLIE COLEMAN (V.O.)
Yeehaw!

WILLIE disconnects. As ROCKET pulls away from the curb his cell rings again. He sees that it is Aziz calling. He activates the hands-free system.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Brother Minister, where are you calling from?

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O.)
Nevermind that, ROWAN. Why did you attack the personnel director in your paper?

ROCKET pauses.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Don't you mean *our* paper, brother?

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O.)
I made it clear that I wouldn't be contributing -

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
- And, your name is nowhere in the pages.

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O.)
ROWAN, unless I give you the word, refrain from making these sort of attacks on people.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Wait a minute, brother Minister. JOSHUA CLEMENS is the living illustration of the House Negro that Minister Malcolm X described in *The House Negro/Field Negro Address*. I don't get why you're angered by this depiction.

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O.)
(coldly and slowly)
ROWAN, you bask in the comfort of the Nation's presence, and it provides you immeasurable security. Without that presence, you'd be eaten alive.

ROCKET looks stunned by what he's hearing.

AZIZ AJUMA (V.O. CONTINUED)
Don't attack anyone without
consulting me.

AZIZ disconnects. ROCKET rubs his forehead as he stops for the red light at Page and Hanley Road.

CUT TO:

INT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - NIGHT

ROCKET and WILLIE sit at a corner table in a very full and lively Yaqui's. The two are finishing a medium pizza.

WILLIE COLEMAN
You see that doll by the bar?

ROCKET adjusts his position to look through a gap in the crowd and see the young lady that WILLIE is referring to.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yeah, She's hot, bruh.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Wifey number two.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I thought you hadn't been married
before.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Not yet. Wifey number one is a
Teaching Assistant at McCluer South
Middle School.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(laughing)
Oh okay.

ROCKET spots a gray-haired very tan gentleman near the bar.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Yo, that's JOEY MARZETTI. Let me go
talk with him to see if he knows
what happened to my papers.

ROCKET cuts through the crowd.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
(politely)
Excuse me please. Excuse me...

He reaches JOEY.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
JOEY, how are you?

JOEY MARZETTI
I'm great ROCKET. How about you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I'm well, thank you.

JOEY MARZETTI
Read your write-up on the city's
personnel director. Wow! Hot stuff.
Scary....

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yeah. The papers seemed to fly off
of the rack in front. Three hundred
in less than three hours.

JOEY MARZETTI
Amazing!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yeah. Maybe too amazing, Joey. Is
your exterior video surveillance
running?

JOEY MARZETTI
Oh yeah. Are you kidding?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I wonder if I could look at it to
check out what happened between
11:30 am and 2:30 pm this
afternoon.

JOEY MARZETTI
Absolutely, Rocket. If you'll be
here awhile, things should calm
around midnight. Just come back to
the office.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I appreciate it, JOEY.

JOEY MARZETTI
Yeah, no problem for the publisher
of the hottest news source in the
region.

MARZETTI smiles. ROCKET pats him on the shoulder and returns to the table where WIFEY NUMBER 2 has joined WILLIE.

CUT TO:

INT. JOEY MARZETTI'S OFFICE - LATER

JOEY MARZETTI sits behind his small steel desk. ROCKET and WILLIE sit in metal folding chairs at the side of JOEY's desk. The three review the video surveillance footage from the day. The video shows the outside of the door to Yaqui's.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Rewind back to about 11:30 am.

JOEY clicks the time-line at 11:30 am. Two young White male patrons leave the Yaqui's through the door. A young Asian girl enters the establishment at 11:33. At 11:38 ROCKET enters with a large stack of papers.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Now, I stayed there for a moment to gauge some reactions to the edition.

A young White man walks into Yaqui's at 11:42. At 11:47 ROCKET walks out of the restaurant.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Forward at 3x speed, JOEY.

JOEY fast forwards. The three observe patron's entering and exiting Yaqui's from 11:48 on. At 1:54 pm a tall, light-skinned Black man in a gray suit, white fedora and a blue bow-tie exits Yaqui's with a large stack of *Xaminers*.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
(excitedly)
Yo! Back that up!

MARZETTI rewinds and pauses.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Damn! That brother was with AZIZ at City Hall when I first met with him.

WILLIE COLEMAN
That's fucked up.

JOEY MARZETTI

I'm dubbing a copy for you now, in case you want to take this to the cops, ROCKET. I know I would.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thanks JOEY. I've gotta think about this carefully though before I do anything.

WILLIE COLEMAN

I wonder if they're hitting all of your drops.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Listen, JOEY, can I set my next month's editions on the end of the bar, where they can be watched by bartenders and service staff?

JOEY MARZETTI

Definitely. I'll let my people know to keep an eye out for anyone trying to take more than one or a couple.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thanks, JOEY.

JOEY MARZETTI

No problem, ROCKET. If it will help, I'll run three months of ads with you at \$350 a month. Just to keep you rollin' while you get things figured out.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

That would be great, JOEY. I appreciate it.

They stand up and shake hands.

JOEY MARZETTI

Hey, I appreciate you and what you're doing.

WILLIE shakes JOEY's hand as well.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Now, that's what I'm talking about. Good lookin' out, sir.

JOEY MARZETTI

It's what we small business folks
have to do.

CUT TO:

INT. MYRTLE HILLIARD NEIGHBORHOOD CLINIC FOYER - DAY

ROCKET looks at the bent empty wire rack with no newspapers in it. It appears that the rack has been vandalized. He goes into the clinic and approaches the front desk clerk. They chat. ROCKET and the clerk shake their heads affirmatively and he leaves. As he exits the entryway, he picks up the bent rack and takes it with him.

CUT TO:

INT. B & L STYLE SHOP - LATER

ROCKET looks at the empty rack in the shop's entryway of B & L. He goes into the shop. Behind a tall glass enclosure stands BUTCH, the shop's owner. Butch is 6 feet 2 inches tall, about 275 pounds of solid dense muscle. BUTCH hits a button, a large glass door releases electronically, and he steps down to the main floor where ROCKET is. The two shake hands and embrace.

BUTCH

ROCKET! What's up, brother? Got
them Cardigan sweaters ready for
fall.

BUTCH points to the rack nearest the door. ROCKET turns to the rack, looks interested and walks over. He looks through the sweaters as BUTCH stands near.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Hey BUTCH, did you notice that all
200 the editions of the *Xaminer*
that I placed yesterday are gone
already?

BUTCH

I did, when I came in. I know you
just set them there yesterday and
thought, "Damn! That's strange." I
couldn't believe that all of those
papers had gotten taken by
customers, even though that issue
was hot as fire.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah. I believe somebody's hitting my stacks and making off with them.

BUTCH

No shit?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

No shit. Would you mind if I placed next month's edition in here on your display table so that you can sort of watch them?

BUTCH

Not at all, ROCKET. I'd be happy to look out for you, brother. Got to keep that truth out there like a jab in your opponents face, you dig?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(smiles)

Yeah. I dig. Thanks, bruh.

ROCKET and BUTCH shake and embrace again.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

And Butch, would you be interested in running some advertisement?

BUTCH

I might. If you're sure that the papers won't disappear.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL AND BUTCH

(laughter)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

We should be good. I'm placing them all under watch like I am with you.

BUTCH

That sounds good. You're not the biggest paper yet, but you are definitely the hottest right now. It could do my shop some good to run with you for a while, provided you keep things hot.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Oh, don't worry, brother. I'm just about to fire up the stove, for real.

BUTCH
Well, all right brother!

ROCKET and BUTCH high five.

CUT TO:

EXT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - EVENING

ROCKET and WILLIE sit at a sidewalk table in front of Yaqui's. ROCKET is reading the newest edition of *The St. Louis Advocate*. There is a photograph of Urban League President RALPH NICHOLS with a huge grin on his face, standing next to a smiling Mayor SEAN HENSON under the headline, *Urban League Honors Mayor SEAN HENSON with a "Most Inspiring St. Louisan" Award*. Rocket face shows disgust.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Un - fucking - believable! These
House Negroes are sinking to the
lowest depths to coddle that racist
after what he did to the first
Black police chief. "*Most Inspiring
St. Louisan*," What the fuck?

WILLIE COLEMAN
That is taking shit a bit far,
bruh. How do you figure this will
go over to the community?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Bruh, for the greater majority of
our people, if they read it in the
St. Louis Advocate, it's gospel.
Most Blacks have no idea that we
are being tricked by these
manipulators.

WILLIE COLEMAN
What manipulators, bruh?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I call them the three Negro P's
that perpetuate the pathetic plight
of Black people.

WILLIE COLEMAN
There you go with that alliteration
that you use to hit us with as
kids. Man, you and that militant
rap used to make us crazy.

WILLIE laughs. ROCKET looks at WILLIE with contempt.

WILLIE COLEMAN (CONT'D)

Man, I'm sorry. Now, what do you mean by the three Negro P's, ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Negros preachers, Negro politicians, and Negro publications.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Damn! You just wiped out Black leadership, man.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

That's right, WILLIE. That's how they're winning the game against us. The Negro preacher pacifies the flock talking that, 'Love your enemy,' 'Turn the other cheek,' and 'You'll get your reward in Heaven' bullshit.

WILLIE COLEMAN

You mean what we grew up on? Bruh, that was even the non-violent philosophy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

That was definitely King in his earlier days as a flagellant -

WILLIE COLEMAN

- Flagellant?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Somebody who allows himself to be whipped on. But to subject yourself and others to the brutality of such a sadist as the White man had historically proven himself to be was to surrender yourself as the ultimate masochist.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Whew! I can tell you been hangin' with those folks from the Nation of Islam. Masochist? Really?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

You know it like a poet, WILLIE.
It's known that near his end of
days, the good Reverend King had a
greater respect for the
philosophies of Malcolm X: *Be
peaceful, be courteous, obey the
law, respect everyone, and if
someone puts his hands on you, send
him to the cemetery.* Now, that's
nonviolence, bruh. It says, 'I'm
chillin', so don't fuck with me and
I won't have to fuck you up.'
You've never heard of Malcolm X or
any of his brethren being slapped,
punched, kicked, or spit on by
angry White mobs, have you?

WILLIE looks puzzled.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Man, it's strange to hear you
talking like this. You are
seriously buying into AZIZ's
rhetoric.

ROCKET narrows his eyes.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah, Aziz. Right...

WILLIE's eyebrows raise.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Anyway, you got the Negro preacher
is living the lifestyle of the rich
and famous while he's running the
game on folks that are po' as Joe's
turkey. The swindler is also raking
in 'Faith Based' grants from the
city as a reward for keeping his
mouth shut about the racist system
that's raping his people to death.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Damn, ROCKET. That's a pretty
serious claim.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

That's just one P. Then there are
the Negro politicians who also live
the good life while their
constituents suffer in the worst
conditions of the entire region.

(MORE)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

These dogs are the most rancid. They serve the money interests, doing the bidding of the racist construction trade unions, and the Black hating White businesses like Payday Loan, and Rent to Own companies and countless other parasites that get fat on the financial despair of largely Black people. These Stymies that we refer to as 'our representatives' stand in front of the people and denounce the racism of their financiers, then get behind closed doors, kiss the ass of their masters, and take the money. When Marcus Tullius Cicero described the traitor, it was quite obvious to me that 'Marcus' was from the 'hood.

WILLIE COLEMAN

(laughing slightly)

I'm sorry ROCKET. What you're saying is Hella - intriguing. It's just that I haven't been around you in years. I'm still trying to adjust to you on this philosophical level. Right now, you're sounding like one of my professors at Lincoln, bruh.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Whatever. You'd better try to get used to me, because this is where my paper will be coming from from now on.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Oh shit!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Which brings us to the Negro publications. You have to ask the question: How in the Hell is a publication Black when it exists exclusively on White money? If the racist institutions cut off the advertisement dollars for a week, the publisher of this bullshit, and the others couldn't even put out a Goddamned flyer to circulate.

(MORE)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

They are funded to spread false hope with their articles and pictures of the Negro preachers, Negro politicians and other so-called 'leaders' like RALPH NICHOLS. The publications trick the readers into believing that there was some special anointing of these charlatans. This allows these shines to be able to operate with impunity. The publications are the most insidious of the three Negro P's. They are the key to the entire ruse. These propaganda pages saturate the community with lies and keep the people in a state of absolute confusion. The *Xaminer* is the first source of this new style of real, bold truth that our people have ever been exposed to. That's why folks love this publication, bruh. It's time for me to take it to the next level.

Willie's brows raise and

WILLIE COLEMAN

What do you mean by that, ROCKET?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

You'll see in the coming month's edition, which rolls out next Wednesday.

WILLIE COLEMAN

(timidly)

I can't wait.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LISA sits up in bed with her back against the headboard. She's reading news copies of ROCKET's files. ROCKET sits on an easy chair at the foot of the bed hunched over his laptop which is on an ottoman in front of him.

LISA

This is very nicely written, ROWAN, but way too harsh for me, baby. You're giving the Urban League President RALPH NICHOLS an award for being the *Stymie of the Month*?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 (chuckling)
 He loves awards, doll.

LISA
 I stay in my lane when you go after these people, ROWAN. You know that. They're Black like you, baby, and it ain't my place to counsel you on your people, just as it is not your place to counsel me on Latinos.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Gracias, mi amor.

LISA looks somberly into ROCKET's eyes.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
 (Gently)
 What is it, LISA.

LISA
 (Voice shaky)
 I'm worried about you, ROWAN, and what can happen to you. And, I'll say it again, baby, I can't take this shit coming back on us. You know that I'm not one for unreasonable conflict. I'll leave ROWAN! I swear, I'll just walk away.

LISA's eyes are teary. ROCKET gets up onto the bed and holds her.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 Baby, aby, don't say that. It's going to be okay. Really.

LISA blows her nose and composes herself.

LISA
 What about AZIZ and the Nation of Islam? You said that he told you not to attack anybody without his say. Did you tell him about this?

A tear rolls slowly across LISA's cheek to her chin.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 LISA, this is my publication. I'm not a member of the Nation of Islam. I am my own man.
 (MORE)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

I'm responsible for what comes from my actions. You have to keep in mind that there is not a single fact within that writing that can be disputed. Yeah, the title *Stymie of the Month* is harsh, but it's editorial. I know it's not like any editorials that we've ever seen, but it's still editorial.

LISA

Well, you can expect a call from AZIZ, and probably a whole lot of other people.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I expect everything, LISA. Trust me, baby. I'm always on guard.

LISA dries her cheek, wipes her eyes, raises her head and they kiss.

CUT TO:

INT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - AFTERNOON

ROCKET places a stack of 300 newspapers on the end of the bar in a crowded Yaqui's. He takes a small stack off of the top and passes newspapers out to patrons at tables between the bar and the front door. A young White couple at the first table that he comes to greets ROCKET affectionately. The husband stands up.

WHITE HUSBAND

Mr. Bell -

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

- Uh, ROCKET, please.

WHITE HUSBAND

ROCKET, we appreciate what you're writing. We may not agree with your choice of wording or descriptions, but we respect your position.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I appreciate you for your honesty. Thanks for reading.

As ROCKET makes his way to the door, still handing out copies of the latest *Xaminer* to patrons, a tall light-skinned young man in a tan suit, brown fedora, and a brown and red bow-tie makes his way to the door from the left side of the room.

The two converge at the door. The light-skinned man cuts in front of ROCKET and walks into the entryway first. He reaches into his inner left lapel pocket and pulls out an object. As they exit the entry, ROCKET balls his fists and his shoulders rise. The light-skinned man has a cell phone in his hand. He turns towards ROCKET, put the phone on speaker and hands it to him. ROCKET stands at-ease.

AZIZ AJUMA V.O.
Assalamu Alaykum, brother ROWAN X.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's ROCKET, sir.

AZIZ AJUMA V.O.
Fine, fine. You've been busy.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yes, and I'm in the throes now.
What is it that you want, Mr.
Ajuma.

AZIZ AJUMA V.O.
Oh, now, brother Rowan X, it is
brother Minister, please.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What do you need?

AZIZ AJUMA V.O.
There is an event taking place
tomorrow at a facility in Lincoln
Square. I've been working on a
project that I've kept under wraps,
I was hoping that the Xaminer could
be my guest and provide some
coverage of the unveiling.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I don't see a problem with that,
brother Minister.

AZIZ AJUMA V.O.
That's wonderful. It's a momentous
occasional. The address is 1140
Hattie Dr. The event begins at 11
am

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's fine. I'll see you there.

AZIZ AJUMA V.O.
Assalamu Alaykum, brother

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Wa Alaykum Assalam, sir.

ROCKET hands the cell phone back to the light-skinned man. The man smiles sinisterly as he looks at ROCKET, takes the phone, and puts it into his lapel pocket. ROCKET walks north towards Iowa to his truck.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROCKET'S TRUCK - DAY

ROCKET is driving east on West Florissant Avenue towards Hattie Drive. His cell phone rings. WILLIE's name pops up on the screen. ROCKET activates the hands-free system.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What's up, WILLIE.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Hey, brother, did you see the *Daily-Chronicle*.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I never see the *Daily-Chronicle*, WILLIE. You know I don't read that mess in a city this size with only one fuckin' daily paper.

WILLIE COLEMAN
I know, I know, but your boy is written up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What boy?

WILLIE COLEMAN
AZIZ! He got a sweet Million-dollar grant from some private investor and the city to fund a new facility.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Where is that facility located, WILLIE?

WILLIE COLEMAN
Uh, let me see. It says in the old parks and recreation facility on Hattie.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Damn, I'm headed there now.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Yo! I'll meet you there in about 20 minutes.

CUT TO:

EXT. 1140 HATTIE DRIVE - DAY

ROCKET arrives at the site and pulls up across Hattie Drive in front of the building. He looks at the press conference that is being set up as he gets out of his truck. He gathers his video camera, tripod, microphone, and DR-40 audio recorder. He clips his recorder to his belt, attaches the microphone to his camera, sets the camera on the tripod, and crosses the street.

ROCKET sees an opening near the podium that is set in front of the main entrance of the brownstone building. Above the doorway, there is a temporary banner that measures 12' x 3', which reads: *the El Jadid Islam (The New Peace) Youth Center - Aziz Ajuma, Founder*. ROCKET films the banner, takes shots of the front of the facility, and gets footage of the gathering crowd.

WILLIE pulls up across Hattie and parks behind ROCKET's truck. He exits his car and crosses Hattie. He joins Rocket near the podium. ROCKET detaches the microphone from his camera.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Here WILLIE. Make yourself useful and earn your stay in this prime journalist position.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Sweet! I'm a news grip!

ROCKET smiles at WILLIE.

The front doors of the center open. Out walks BUFORD CARLSON, the president of the NAACP, CARL JENKINS (president of the City Council), MICHAEL LAYTON (CEO of Riteway Markets), ARNOLD DOTSON (community liaison for the mayor of St. Louis), RALPH NICHOLS (President of the Urban League), personnel director JOSHUA CLEMENS, Mayor SEAN HENSON, and AZIZ AJUMA. AZIZ takes to the microphone as the entourage gathers around him. WILLIE looks at ROCKET as ROCKET films and stares in disbelief.

Aziz is just feet away from ROCKET and never makes eye contact.

AZIZ AJUMA

Today our community has a new place for young people to explore, learn, grow, engage, and socialize together. I'd like to thank these distinguished city leaders for recognizing the importance of our mission to the fiber of this great city. Besides my wonderful friends here gathered around me, I owe a debt of thanks to my media partners, Dr. Bishop Pennington of the *St. Louis Advocate*, Albert Mitchell of the *River City Current*, and the staff of the *Daily-Chronicle*. These wonderful newspapers keep our community informed.

ROCKET continues staring with a blank gaze. WILLIE looks at ROCKET and looks down. He shakes his head slightly in shock.

WILLIE COLEMAN

(under his breath to
ROCKET)

They got that motherfucker. He won't even acknowledge you. You been played, bruh.

ROCKET continues looking on.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The evening glow of the setting sun winks through the parted curtains as ROCKET and LISA sit on the sofa.

LISA

So he didn't look at you or mention you or the *Xaminer*, but he praised those "leaders" and other publications? Fucking lowlife. I was always worried, ROWAN. I told you he's a Goddamned user.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Not surprisingly, as I packed up to leave the press conference, I got a call from each of AZIZ's advertisers alerting me that they would be stopping their ads in the paper.

LISA

Oh, baby. How will you publish?
What are you going to do?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I still have Yaqui's, B & L, and the state notices. That will keep me publishing. I can't do much to expand distribution, which is what I was seriously hoping to do. Still can't pay myself much. Just a bit more than covering my expenses, doll. I'm sorry. I had hoped that I was on a path that would provide something solid for us.

LISA

You know that I've got us for what we need, baby. The expenses that the paper covers are a great help, you know that. I just want you to feel right about what you're doing, baby. I knew you never would with AZIZ in the mix.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

This fucked up situation could offer me some serious opportunities. The recorded footage of the press conference was immaculate, sound and video. Willie was a great help. He wants to work with me after his school shifts with some video segments that can I feed into the online publication.

LISA

Like an online news show?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah, love. Just news segments, press conferences, and selected interviews. I can create video ads, and sells spots at the top of segments. That's the direction that media seems to be headed anyway.

LISA

How can you do that without money,
ROWAN?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I do the shooting, editing, and website updates myself.

(MORE)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

That doesn't cost anything additional. Willie says that he'll help me just to expand his media skills beyond his music, and for a meal now and then.

LISA

Will these segments be controversial, ROWAN? I would think you'd have enough of that nonsense.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Controversial is relative, lisa. The segments will just be presented as they are. They will be truth. Just documentation. If that's controversial, then I guess it is what it is.

LISA

Oh boy. Well, at least you don't have to concern yourself with what AZIZ thinks, or anybody else for that matter. You're on your own, for real, now.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Free to do this in whatever way I wanna. It's show time, LISA.

Lisa's eyebrows raise. Rocket leans over and kisses her.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. ST. LOUIS CENTRAL PUBLIC LIBRARY - MORNING

The morning sun rises over the Civil Courts building onto downtown Market Street. ROCKET stands outside of the temporary construction fencing of the St. Louis Central Public Library. He is near the single gate entrance and exit at the corner of 14th and Locust. The *New Life* homeless shelter sits on the northwest corner of 14th and Locust. There are two homeless Black men sitting on the sidewalk in front of the shelter with their backs against the wall of the staircase. ROCKET pulls out his cellphone and takes a picture of the homeless men across the street. He also takes a picture of the signpost with the two cross-streets: *14th and Locust*.

Hard-hatted construction workers enter and exit the library building inside of the fence, carrying materials.

A group of seven workers are taking a smoke break in a shaded area in the northwest corner of the project yard. Some of the smokers observe ROCKET casually one at a time as he looks in. ROCKET writes notes on a small pad.

A group of 4 high school aged Black young men walk up 14th towards ROCKET. They are all wearing dark blue polo shirts and khaki pants. ROCKET discreetly takes a photo of the boys as they pass the library site. He captures some of the workers in the background of the shot. The boys walk up the stairs of the *City Charter School* on the northeast corner of 14th and Locust. ROCKET puts his cellphone away.

A large colorful sign on the temporary fencing next to ROCKET and the entrance reads: *A Federal, State and Locally Funded Project. A 100 MILLION DOLLAR Renovation proposed by Governor Peter Richter and Mayor Sean Henson. Your tax dollars at work!*

ROCKET takes a picture of the sign. He takes picture of the group of smoking workers as they break up. He also gets shots of workers entering and exiting the building.

All of those in the photos on the project are White males.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S TRUCK - LATER

ROCKET's cellphone rings. WILLIE's name is on the screen. ROCKET activates the hands-free system.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

WILLIE!

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.

Yeah, ROCKET. I got a text message to call you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah, brother. Can you meet at the St. Louis Central Public Library at about 3:45 pm today.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.

I should able to be there with no problem. School is out at 2:50. What's up?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I want to shoot a video news piece on the lack of Black participation on the \$100 MILLION dollar public funded renovation project. I've got some still shots for the piece. I just want video as well.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.

No Black participation?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I didn't one Black worker, and I was there for over an hour this morning.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.

That's crazy, bruh! I'll be there by 3:45, man.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Great! I'll have the equipment and be waiting. Park at 14th and Locust.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.

Fourteenth and Locust. Got it.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

All right, brother. Peace-out.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.

Yeah, bruh. Peace and love.

ROCKET disconnects.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. ST. LOUIS CENTRAL PUBLIC LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

ROCKET has a Canon 70-D on a steady-cam rig. The camera clock reads 4:02 pm. Willie has a shotgun microphone in his right hand, holds a click-counter in his left, and has the DR40 clipped to his left side.

The construction workers begin walking towards the only gate exit, which is directly next to ROCKET and WILLIE. ROCKET films as WILLIE records sound and clicks away on the counter.

Some of the workers look perturbed by ROCKET's standing near their path. One worker smiles big into ROCKET's camera as he passes. Another gives the camera the finger. Most of the men don't look up as they pass. Some look away.

An older White man in a blue and white striped button-down shirt and navy blue slacks approaches ROCKET quickly with his hand extended towards the camera.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yo! What's your fucking problem?

OLDER WORKER
Who are you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I'm Rowan Bell with the *Xaminer News*. Who are you?

OLDER WORKER
I'm Jeff Porter, project manager.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yeah, well, congratulations, but keep your Goddamned hand away from my camera. I'm working.

The project manager locks the gate behind the last worker.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Damn! That was 97 crew members.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
And not a single one Black. That's a wrap, brother.

ROCKET and WILLIE cross 14th. The project manager makes a call on his cellphone, and walks towards a white Ford pick-up parked at the edge of the fencing.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S HOME OFFICE - EVENING

The moonlight beams through the numerous windows of the rear sun-porch/office. ROCKET sits behind a small rolling computer cart with his MacBook Air. He's editing the footage and photos from the earlier library shoot.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
LISA!

LISA V.O.
(from another room)
What, love?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Come'ere. Check out this segment.

Lisa enters the office from the kitchen doorway.

LISA
You need a light on, ROCKET, you'll
ruin your eyes.

She turns on a small lamp that sits on top of a five-foot cherry-wood filing cabinet in the corner of the room next to ROCKET. Lisa stands behind ROCKET looking over him at the screen.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
It speaks for itself, doll.

ROCKET plays back the edited work. A mellow, somber jazz tune begins under darkness. The video fades in with a shot of the signpost at 14th and Locust the fades out to a title page: *At the corner of 14th and Locust our children encounter a disturbing vision.* Fades to the picture of the students. Fades to a title page: *On the Northwest corner, they see the homeless, who are Black like them.* Fades to the homeless men sitting on the sidewalk. Fades to a title page: *And on the southeast corner, they see construction workers on a 100 Million dollar public funded project, who are NOT Black like them.* Dissolves to moving footage of the workers leaving the job site. The worker smiles big into the camera and another gives the finger and all of the workforce passes the camera in accelerated time-lapse.

ROCKET attenuates the music and amplifies the voices of the project manager and himself.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL V.O.
Yo! What's your fucking problem?

OLDER WORKER V.O.
Who are you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL V.O.
I'm Rowan Bell with the *Xaminer*.
Who are you?

OLDER WORKER V.O.
I'm Jeff Porter, project manager.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL V.O.
Yeah, well, congratulations, but
keep your Goddamned hand away from
my camera. I'm working.

ROCKET amplifies the music after the exchange and dissolves to the sign: *A Federal, State and Locally Funded Project. A 100 MILLION DOLLAR Renovation proposed by Governor Peter Richter and Mayor Sean Henson. Your tax dollars at work!* The music diminishes and the video fades to black.

Lisa has her hand over her mouth and looks stunned.

LISA

Oh my God! I guess that I don't have to ask is that what really happened.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Like I said...

LISA

That's unbelievable, ROCKET. How did you know about this?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Driving past one afternoon, I stopped and looked for about a half hour and never saw a Black worker.

LISA

That's so disturbing. On a federal, state, and locally funded project.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah, baby.

LISA

What do you do now?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Post it to the website, e-blast link to all of my site subscribers -

LISA

- All two of us.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(laughing)

Right. Actually, I've got 756 from the state database, because my publication is -

LISA

A Minority Business Enterprise. I know, I know.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's the only good and lasting
thing that came from AZIZ's advice.
I'll post the link on the
publication's Facebook page too.

LISA
Sounds good. Let's go to bed, love.

Lisa turns her back to ROCKET and flips up the back of her nightgown. She's wearing a pink lace thong.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Oh, shit!

He rears back in his chair.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
I gotta post this, doll. Damn! I'll
be in there in a minute.

LISA
Prisa, mi amor.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I still love it when you speak
Spanish, doll.

LISA
I know it, baby. That's why I do
it.

Lisa walks through the kitchen with her hips sensually swinging. ROCKET watches her disappear around the hallway corner and continues his work on his segment.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

ROCKET's asleep on his stomach, with a drooling open mouth smile. His cellphone rings. He wakes up and looks at the clock. It reads 8:07 AM. He grabs his phone. LISA's I.D. is displayed. ROCKET touches the talk button and puts it on speaker.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What's up, doll.

LISA V.O.
Baby, have you been on Facebook
yet?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
No, Lemon Pie. What's up?

LISA V.O.
Your video post has been shared 143
times, ROCKET!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
One-Hundred forty three shares!
That's impossible, LISA. The *Daily
Chronicle's* most popular news
segments get maybe 20 shares at the
most. That's got to be false
calculation, baby.

LISA V.O.
The video is on my timeline, shared
by my friend, Dona Maria. She
doesn't have radical leanings of
any sort. It's being shared and
commented on, ROWAN.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's crazy!

LISA V.O.
Baby, I got to go. My kids are
coming in from morning welcoming.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Okay, doll. I'll talk to you later.

LISA V.O.
Bye, love.

They disconnect. ROCKET jumps up from the bed and walks into
the bathroom.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(rapping)
*Yes! The Rhythm, the rebel,
without a pause I'm lowering my
level...*

His cellphone rings. The display reads: *unknown*. ROCKET
presses the talk and speaker buttons.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
The *Xtraordinary Xaminer* -

DARK VOICE V.O.
(Loud and raspy)
You better watch your ass, boy!

The call disconnects. ROCKET looks at the phone, looks at the mirror, picks up the shaving cream canister, squeezes foam onto his left hand, and continues rapping *Rebel Without a Pause* by **Public Enemy**.

CUT TO:

INT. CARVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Lisa enters the faculty break-room. There is a woman sitting at the faculty lunch table in the center of the room. She's fair-skinned, stout, with salt and pepper hair, very well styled. She's casually reading an *Xaminer*. Lisa walks over to the coffee dispenser. With her back to the woman she makes a distressed face. She fills her coffee cup, gathers herself, and takes a seat across the table from the woman.

The woman looks over the top of the *Xaminer* and over her reading glasses.

WOMAN

Oh. Good afternoon.

LISA

(shyly)

Good afternoon.

WOMAN

We've not met, because I primarily work with building principals as district curriculum coordinator.
I'm VERA.

She extends her hand to shake LISA's.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Vera Nichols.

They shake. LISA's hand drops limply.

LISA

(timidly)

I'm LISA BELL.

WOMAN

I'm aware. That's a beautiful wedding set on your hand, Lisa.
Someone loves you very much.

LISA sips her coffee and nods affirmatively.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You are so beautiful. Are you
Brazilian, Venezuelan...

LISA

Thank you. I'm Mexican.

WOMAN

Lovely. Lovely. What does your
husband do?

LISA

He's a business owner.

WOMAN

What sort of business?

LISA

Media and technology.

The woman leans forward and lays the newspaper down abruptly.

WOMAN

Let's cut the shit, dear. Your
husband is the menacing publisher
of this rag in my hand.

LISA's eyes swell from intimidation, and she leans back in
her chair as if she's in fear of apprehension.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

My husband happens to be the well-
respected head of a national civil
rights organization, and doesn't
need some young, untested smart-ass
trying to defame his character.

LISA

My husband's opinions have nothing
to do with me, and I have no
connection to his work. I am a good
teacher and I do my job.

VERA readjusts and leans back casually looking at the *Xaminer*
again. Her shoulders relax. LISA adjusts and sits forward
again and continues to sip her coffee.

WOMAN

Yes. I've gathered that you are
well liked and a good teacher. Good
teachers have excellent skills in
redirecting wayward children, don't
they?

LISA

Yes. I'd say that's a vital skill.

WOMAN

Husbands are sometimes a lot like children. Wouldn't you say?

LISA

I guess they can be.

WOMAN

Believe me, dear, they are. They can be so disruptive to our sanctity, our peace of mind, our livelihood...

A tear wells in LISA's eye and skis across the rounded slope of her high-boned cheek, pausing at her chin before diving onto her the right bosom of her royal blue silk blouse.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Not to worry, dear. As you stated, you're a "good teacher," and you "do" your "job."

VERA stands up, closes the paper, and slides it to the center of the table. Lisa is crying silent tears.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

This is Missouri, dear. Show me.

VERA exits. LISA puts her head down and sobs.

CUT TO:

INT. B & L STYLE SHOP - LATER

BUTCH, WILLIE, and ROCKET sit in the customer lounge area in the front southeast corner of the shop on a red two-piece L-shaped sofa. The lounge has the touches of a living room, with a small glass coffee table, a glass end table with a lamp, and a 52" plasma television on a side wall.

BUTCH

How does it feel to be leading the news cycle of the region?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I don't know about all of that, bruh.

WILLIE COLEMAN

ROCKET, man, ours is the story. While the other media is talking about crime and despair, you're at the root cause of it all, poverty and racism. That video has got a lot of people talking.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I wonder what the other media outlets are going to do about it.

BUTCH

Whatever they do, you set this story in motion. That's what make your publication the best. Not the biggest. The *leader*.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

WILLIE, I'm going to need you for some of the upcoming events that I'll be covering. I want to get footage of some of the civic organization meetings, especially the events that the mayor sits in on.

WILLIE COLEMAN

ROCKET, as long as the meetings don't conflict with my school hours, I'm down. Shit, I'm loving this. You gave me credit for sound and grips on that video, and I'm using that as honey-bait.

ROCKET, BUTCH & WILLIE

(laughing)

BUTCH

You gonna capture some of these shines on video, huh ROCKET?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yep. I want to keep the people apprised of as much as I can while I have their attention. I also have to figure out the best way to turn this attention into revenue. I'm talking with Brock Auto Sales to run a video commercial on the front of our next segment.

BUTCH

My man! Get that money, ROCKET. You deserve it most of all.

WILLIE COLEMAN

That's real talk, bruh.

BUTCH

ROCKET, last week I went to the Tivoli Theatre and caught this independent film joint called *The Black Power Mix Tape*. It was a compilation of rediscovered footage from the 1960s and '70s. The director just spliced together the raw tape. It was awesome!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I need to check that out. Think about making a film of all these sell-outs. That'll bring in revenue for sure. These minstrels on the big screen could be a major spectacle.

ROCKET, BUTCH & WILLIE

(laughing)

ROCKET stands up.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm heading home to LISA.

BUTCH and WILLIE stand as well. ROCKET shakes their hands and embraces each of them.

WILLIE COLEMAN

And I'm heading out to find wifey.

BUTCH

Peace out, you two shit-disturbers. Brothers, be careful out there!

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

LISA sits on the couch in a very large tee shirt and footies, looking into her laptop. Her eyes droop. She dabs her nose with a Kleenex.

ROCKET does a Temptations (*singing group*) spin into the front door.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 Hey! Hey! (somerly) Hey? What's
 the matter, princess?

Lisa shakes her head as if nothings wrong. ROCKET sits next
 to her and kisses her eyebrow.

LISA
 I had my job threatened today,
 ROWAN.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 What? Why? By whom?

LISA
 It seems that Mr. "Urban League,"
 RALPH NICHOLS'S wife VERA is the
 districts curriculum coordinator.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 She threatened your job, baby we
 can sue if something were to
 happen. You're an excellent teacher
 with an impeccable record.

LISA touches ROCKETS cheek.

LISA
 It's not about that, baby. They
 would just settle with a severance.
 They want me to shut you up, and I
 don't want to do that...

LISA begins crying hard and leans into ROCKET'S shoulder.
 ROCKET'S eyes dart furiously.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 I'll kick that motherfucker
 NICHOLS'S ass on the streets when I
 see him -

LISA
 Come on, baby. Stop it with that
 ignorance. It wouldn't be worth the
 consequences. I was just on some
 sites looking for another school
 system to be in.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 But, you love your district!

LISA
 ROWAN, I can't be there with this
 kind of bullshit in the mix.
 (MORE)

LISA (CONT'D)

I'm looking abroad, baby. I've got friends who have taken positions in places like Germany, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates...

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I can't just leave and go to those places, love.

LISA

I know, love. I'm talking about just me, ROWAN.

ROCKET stands up abruptly.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

()

You're leaving me, LISA? I'll let this paper go, baby. I don't need this -

LISA

- No, no, ROCKET. You know that I've never been one for conflict. I've always told you that. But, I don't want you to stop what you're doing. I just need to be out of the line of fire. I'm a vulnerability for you. I don't want to be that. I've been told that the contracts abroad are lucrative. They provide your housing. I would make much more money. Hell, in the UAE, it's actually tax free money.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

How would we make it apart like that, doll?

LISA

With all of our love, baby. Military families do it all the time. It's fine, sweetie. Besides, I'm just submitting applications so far.

ROCKET looks stunned.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

You've submitted apps already?

LISA

Yes, baby. I'm not waiting for you to set off the next storm.

(MORE)

LISA (CONT'D)

I know that I'll have to go. This school's administration has run away good teachers over politics in the past. I'll be a target now if I don't stop you, baby. It's just time for me to go.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

How soon, LISA?

Some of these openings are for November. I know it's odd, but some are on trimester systems, and they're looking for people to fill the second phase.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Damn, baby. I would have to adjust quickly.

LISA

Start now, ROWAN. If I secure a position, I'm resigning immediately. It will be my little fuck you to that bitch Vera Nichols. I don't care what sort of contract penalty they try to hit me with. They'll miss my dedicated ass.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Shit, shit, SHIT!

ROCKET tries to gather his composure.

Okay, doll. I'll try to wrap my head around it.

LISA

Thanks, my love. I promise, we'll be fine.

CUT TO:

INT. STARBUCKS - MORNING

The clock above the list of Starbucks latte shows 7:08. ROCKET takes his order of green mint tea from the counter and notices a *Daily Chronicle* next to the cash register. Below the fold, on the lower right fourth of the front page is the two-column headline: *NAACP Gives Two Thumbs Up To Minority Participation on the Central Public Library Project.*

There's a photo of a grinning BUFORD CARLSON in the middle of the columns.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
May I buy this, please.

CASHIER
That was left to share. You can take it.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Thanks.

ROCKET takes the newspaper and sits at a corner table in the front window. He sips his tea and reads the article with furrowed brows. He shakes his head negatively.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
(Softly, to himself)
Un - fucking - believable...

ROCKET takes out his cellphone and punches a speed dial #2 for WILLIE.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.
ROCKET! I just saw it!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
They got that lackey to lie in the face of the truth.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.
ROCKET, man, everybody's seen the video. They know he's lying.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
WILLIE, it's like a game of conflicting accounts, played to make people not know what to believe. Even though a lot of folks saw our segment with their own eyes, if one of these so-called "leaders" steps up to present a claim that's contrary, people are left not knowing what's true. He didn't refute our account, because that would have given us credence. He doesn't mention it and just creates the illusion that the project should be praised and rewarded for the inclusion of minorities. The fact that it's in the only daily paper in our region gives it that much more validity.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.
 These bootlickers are crafty as
 Hell.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 (laughing loudly)
 Bootlickers! Yeah!

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.
 What's our move, doctor?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 We still go forth gathering the
 footage from events with these
 shysters. What are you doing at 7
 pm this evening?

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.
 Huntin' honeys, bruh.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 Put that shit on hold and join me
 and Lisa at the Tivoli to check out
Black Power Mix Tape.

WILLIE COLEMAN V.O.
 All right, ROCKET. I'm down. I
 ain't gonna be no third wheel,
 though. I'm gonna see if wifey
 number 5 wants to tag along. She
 hella hot, bruh, with -

ROCKET disconnects.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THREE KINGS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

ROCKET, LISA, WILLIE, and WIFEY #5 sit in the front window
 booth of Three Kings Restaurant in University City. There are
 coffees, teas, and desserts on the table. Out the window and
 across the street, the Tivoli marquee bulbs dance around the
 bold black all capital letters spelling out *BLACK POWER MIX*
TAPE.

WIFEY #5
 Thank you, so much WILLIE for
 inviting me. That was such an
 amazing movie.

LISA
 Yes, it was. Very uplifting.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Those brothers and sisters were so devoted to truth and to the betterment of our people. There just aren't any real leaders like that any more.

LISA

I take exception to that. My husband is a *real leader*.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Hear, hear.

The group raise their coffee cups and tap them in a toast to ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I was digging the construction of the film, and taking notes on the structure of the footage, photos, and dialogue. It was very well done. There was a really small crew that worked on it, from what the credits read.

He leans back in his seat deep in thought.

LISA

What are you thinking, baby.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

It could be like an *Anti Black Power Mix Tape!*

WIFEY #5

You're gonna make a movie?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I can definitely do it from the footage that we've gathered.

LISA

I am so glad that I'm getting closer to possibly escaping this.

WILLIE COLEMAN

What do you mean?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
LISA has a second interview with
the Abu Dhabi Education Council.

WIFEY #5
Abu Dhabi! Girl! That's wonderful!

WILLIE COLEMAN
And a Hell of a long way away.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
We're seriously hoping that she
gets the position. It will get her
away from the fallout from my work.
She'll be safe and we'll be clear
of any financial backlash.

LISA
I could be making a lot more money,
and the idea of being out of the
crossfire gives me peace.

WILLIE COLEMAN
I understand. Good luck.

WIFEY #5
Yeah, girl, good luck. I hope you
get it.

ROCKET raises his coffee cup.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
A toast.

They all raise their coffee cups.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
To my gorgeous wife in her pursuit
of broader horizons, and to an
upcoming film -

WILLIE COLEMAN
What are you calling it?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I don't know yet. Maybe the title
will come as I'm in the process of
putting it together.

LISA
Yeah. For now, we'll just call it
The ROCKET Mix Tape.

WILLIE COLEMAN
 To LISA's quest and *The ROCKET Mix Tape*.

The foursome touch cups and drink.

CUT TO:

INT. YAQUI'S ON CHEROKEE STREET - AFTERNOON

ROCKET sets a stack of 400 *Xaminers* on the end of the bar. The edition has the signature 4-photo and caption array under the distinctive *Xaminer* masthead. Top left photo is of the young high school students walking past the library construction site over the caption: *Invisibility*. The top right is a picture of the homeless Black men in front of the *New Life* shelter, over the caption: *We Want To Work Too*. The lower left photo is of construction workers through the fencing. The sign is on the gate, but ROCKET has apparently manipulated the wording with photo shop. The sign reads: *NO NEGROES ALLOWED - proposed by Governor Peter Richter and Mayor Sean Henson*. The lower right photo is of BUFORD CARLSON with a befuddled look on his face over a caption that reads: *BOOTLICKER of the Month*.

The Middle Eastern bartender looks over a copy of the newspaper, waves and gives ROCKET a thumbs up. ROCKET takes a short stack of papers and passes them out as he heads towards the door. He sees JOSHUA CLEMENS walk in the front door and go towards the bar. ROCKET continues his path, and recognizes the ELDERLY man from the barber shop sitting at a table close to the door having lunch and chatting with a young man.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
 Hello, sir. How are you.

ROCKET puts a newspaper in his hand. The ELDERLY man begins to stand.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
 Please, don't get up.

The ELDERLY man stands anyway.

ELDERLY
 I'm well, young man. Thank you.

He looks at the front page of the *Xaminer* and smiles.

ELDERLY (CONT'D)
 My goodness. Still at it, huh?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yes, sir.

ELDERLY

Good for you. This is my grandson,
Phillip.

The GRANDSON stands up to shake hands with ROCKET.

ELDERLY (CONT'D)

He's a junior in high school and a
fine young track star.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I ran track!

GRANDSON

I know all about you, ROCKET.
You're a legend to us at Christ the
Savior Church.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thank you, brother.

The ELDERLY man and GRANDSON sit down.

ELDERLY

We came here because it's
advertised in your paper. I told
the owner that. We support everyone
who support you and this wonderful
publication. As a matter of fact...

The ELDERLY man reaches in his jack pocket, gets his wallet,
and pulls out a fifty dollar bill.

ELDERLY (CONT'D)

This is for you.

ROCKET steps back and shakes his head.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

No -

ELDERLY

Rather than be here all afternoon,
I suggest you take this. We should
be subscribing to your paper. I
just want to help. I know you lost
some advertisers since I saw you
last.

The GRANDSON shakes his head yes, and signals to ROCKET to
take the money.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Okay. But this will be going to my
film fund.

ELDERLY
(excitedly)
You're making a film? That's
wonderful! We'll be wherever it
shows.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I appreciate that.

ELDERLY
You keep on, keepin' on, son, and
don't let us hold you up any
longer. You've got truth to deliver
to the people.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yes sir, yes sir. Have a great day,
gentlemen.

GRANDSON
Thank you.

ELDERLY
You do the same, young soldier.

ROCKET exits Yaqui's.

CUT TO:

INT. B & L STYLE SHOP - LATER

ROCKET enters B & L with a stack of 300 papers. BUTCH hits
the release to the door of his glass cell and steps down.

BUTCH
ROCKET, brother, listen, don't put
the papers in this month, and I've
got to pull my ad.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What? What's up with you?

BUTCH
About an hour ago, I get a call
from that city personnel director.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
JOSH CLEMENS? I saw his ass at
Yaqui's around two hours ago.

BUTCH

Twenty minutes after the call, I get the building inspector walking around here taking notes on the building. Talking that "This could be a violation and that could be a violation," shit. Said he'd be back after he checks the codes downtown. He's just fucking with me because I fuck with you.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Rancid ass cowards. I guess I *do* need the ELDERLY man's money.

BUTCH

What?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Never mind.

BUTCH

Listen, I'm still going to give you some help each month. You just can't run the ad, and I want to keep the paper out of the shop until things settle down.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I hear you.

BUTCH

If JOSHUA CLEMENS was at Yaqui's, you can expect to get the same from Marzetti that you're getting from me. They're trying to shut you down for good.

ROCKET paces a bit.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I still have my state notices, but that can't cover all the expenses. I'm trying to get this film together, and I'll have to rent a venue to show it.

BUTCH

Don't forget event insurance. Last thing you need is for somebody to fall and sue you for whatever you make on the movie.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Yeah. You're right.

BUTCH reaches into his pocket and pulls out a roll of \$100 dollar bills. He peels off 4 \$100 dollar bills.

BUTCH
Here ROCKET. This is for not running next month's ad.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL AND BUTCH
(laughing)

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Thank you, BUTCH.

BUTCH
Get busy on that film before you don't have a way to get it out.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Instead of next month's print edition, I'll be putting all of my time into the film. I'm also going to shoot, edit, and run a video ad for you on the front of the movie.

BUTCH
(laughing)
Yeah! Letting those cowards know they can *kiss my ass*. I dig it.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL AND BUTCH
(laughing)

CUT TO:

INT. LAMBERT AIRPORT TERMINAL 1 - EVENING

ROCKET holds and kisses LISA near the entrance to the C-Gates. He is rigid, and with stern eyes. LISA is crying softly. Passengers with rolling and toted carryons pass on both sides of the couple, making their way to the two TSA agents verifying tickets and identification/passports.

LISA
We've got Skype, thankfully. Let's video chat every night. That will be morning for you with the 10-hour difference between here and Abu Dhabi.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Absolutely, baby. Whatever we need to do, doll.

LISA

Unlike the military, you have the freedom to visit me at anytime that we can afford it.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

With the expenses of the film and the strangling of my funding sources, I'm not sure when I'll be able to afford it. I'm sorry that I brought this on us, LISA.

LISA

Baby, don't be. I'll be making a considerable amount more, ROWAN. We'll get you over to visit me.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

The most important thing is that you'll be out of the line of fire, baby. They can't hurt us through you.

LISA

That actually gives me peace. No more disruption from you and your Bootlickers.

ROCKET smiles.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I love the way you say that.

LISA

What? Bootlickers?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah. It has a deep kind of comedic edge when you say it. I write it and say it all of the time, but coming from you makes it more stark.

LISA

Well, that's your word, baby. Not something that I actually would say to or about anyone.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's not just my word, baby,
that's my film title: *BOOTLICKER*.

ROCKET smiles at LISA

LISA
(abrupt and hurried)
Oh my. Okay, love, I'm off. Get to
work.

They kiss twice as they pull away from one another. LISA gets in line for the TSA check, and ROCKET walks toward the terminal exit.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S HOME OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The printer ejects the image spitting it into the print tray. ROCKET picks up the rendering and looks it over. The black and white copy of a drawing has a man, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Mayor SEAN HENSON, standing under the Gateway Arch with a section of the Arch folding into his hand like a whip. There is a groveling Black man on his knees at the mayor's feet. At the bottom of the page: *BOOTLICKER - Tivoli Theatre, Tuesday, October 3, 7pm, Tickets \$10.*

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSCH STADIUM - DAY

ROCKET and WILLIE stand outside of the stadium's main gates each with a stack of flyers and a large box between them. They hand the leaflets to ballpark patrons and passers by. One man, White, in his forties, shaved head, with his wife and two boys, abruptly hands the flyer back to ROCKET.

SHAVED HEAD MAN
I don't want this racist filth.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Neither do I, that's why you need
to see the film.

The man sneers at ROCKET and walks his family into the stadium.

WILLIE COLEMAN
You couldn't have picked a better
spot to hand these out, or a better
day.

(MORE)

WILLIE COLEMAN (CONT'D)

A beautiful Saturday afternoon
playoff game against the Cubs. I'll
bet the Cubs fans are loving these
flyers. You might even get some of
them to come to the film. Having
HENSON's face on here is a stroke
of genius, considering his upcoming
primary election on November 1st.
BOOTLICKER could be a hit, bruh.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

It'd better, WILLIE. I owe the
Tivoli twelve-hundred dollars, plus
another one-hundred fifty dollars
to have *BOOTLICKER* on the main
marquee. Then I have to pay Allied
Insurance two-hundred and fifty
dollars -

WILLIE COLEMAN

- For a two hour event certificate
that no one will be hurt at? What
the fuck? Goddamn scam artists.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I know, right? Money is tight at
home. LISA has to scrape by in Abu
Dhabi until she gets her first
check. This *has* to generate some
revenue, bruh.

ROCKET spots a black BMW with tinted windows parked across
Broadway. The driver's window is halfway down, but ROCKET
can't see if it's Aziz inside. He casually turns towards
WILLIE while still passing out the material.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Don't look, but I believe that's
Aziz parked across Broadway.

WILLIE COLEMAN

Fuck that fool, ROCKET. He used the
Xaminer to leverage himself a
payoff. That's a dirty dealing son
of a bitch, man.

The BMW pulls away.

WILLIE COLEMAN (CONT'D)

You obviously missed me handing
Mayor SEAN HENSON and his campaign
manager, DAVID WOLFE each a flyer.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Get the fuck outta here!

WILLIE COLEMAN
You know he wouldn't miss a
Cards/Cubs playoff game with the
election coming up. The WOLFMAN
looked mad as hell. Your ass is
gonna be in trouble!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
As Malcolm X said, "We already in
trouble, Goddammit."

WILLIE hands a flyer to a lovely young golden-brown lady with
her son, about 11 years old. She smiles at WILLIE as they
continue towards the gate. WILLIE watches her walk towards
the gate.

WILLIE COLEMAN
Damn! Wifey #9, and with our son in
tow.

The two laugh and continue handing out the material.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET'S HOME OFFICE - AFTERNOON

ROCKET enters a phone number into his phone and presses send,
he puts the phone on speaker and sets it down. He types on
his Laptop as the phone rings.

ATTENDANT V.O.
Good afternoon, Missouri Office Of
Administration, accounts payable.
This is Helen. How can I help you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Hello Helen. This is ROWAN BELL,
publisher of the *Xaminer* Newspaper
in St. Louis. I'm waiting for the
deposit from last month's state
notice placements, and it has not
reached my bank yet. It usually is
in the account on the first of the
month.

ATTENDANT V.O.
Please hold on and I'll check for
you.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thank you.

MALE ATTENDANT V.O.

Mr. Bell?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yes.

MALE ATTENDANT V.O.

This is Arnold Taylor, chief administrator. It seems that the City of St. Louis's Office of Inclusion contacted us for a verification of your Minority Business Enterprise status, and we have to wait for that verification completion to release funds. I'm sorry.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(agitated)

What do you mean? My firm has been a certified MBE since last May.

MALE ATTENDANT V.O.

I understand, however, when there is a challenge to the status of a firm, we have to freeze all transactions until verification can be made.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

How long does that take?

MALE ATTENDANT V.O.

Four to six weeks.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

(perturbed)

Four to six weeks?

MALE ATTENDANT V.O.

Yes, sir. I'm sorry.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yeah! Me too.

MALE ATTENDANT V.O.

Have a good day.

ROCKET disconnects.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(to himself)
These *hijo de punta*.

INT. ROCKET'S TRUCK - DAY

ROCKET drives down Martin Luther King Blvd. toward downtown. Marvin Gaye's *Makes Me Wanna Holler* plays on ROCKET's stereo. He passes the blighted area near Sarah. His cellphone rings. The I.D. Shows (314)444-4444. ROCKET activates the hands-free system.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
ROCKET here.

BRADY MICHAELS
Hello, Mr. Bell. This is BRADY MICHAELS of *Action News 4*. How are you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I'm well. Thank you. And, you?

BRADY MICHAELS
Great, thanks. I'm calling to ask if I could interview you about your upcoming film release.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(perked up)
Definitely! When would you want to do it.

BRADY MICHAELS
I hope this afternoon, if possible. I'd like to have it on our six o'clock news.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's great with me. Where?

BRADY MICHAELS
You can choose the location, if you'd like.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
How about in front of B & L Style Shop, at 5635 Delmar.

BRADY MICHAELS
Sounds great! Will 2 pm work for you?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Two o'clock works fine. I'll see
you there.

BRADY MICHAELS
Thank you, Mr. Bell.

They disconnect.

EXT. B & L STYLE SHOP - LATER

ROCKET and BUTCH lean against the west wall of B & L. Brady's
Action News 4 van pulls onto the lot in front of the two.
BRADY rolls down his passenger window.

BRADY MICHAELS
Mr. Bell?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's me.

BRADY MICHAELS
I need to get out my equipment.
I'll be ready in five.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Great!

BUTCH
Take him to the front of the store
and get the new sign in the shot.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Got you, bruh.

BUTCH and ROCKET Black power shake and BUTCH walks into the
shop.

BRADY MICHAELS
Okay, Mr. Bell.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
ROCKET. Please.

BRADY MICHAELS
Okay ROCKET, shall we shoot right
here?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
How about the storefront?

BRADY MICHAELS
Works for me.

They walk to the front side of B & L. BRADY sets up a low shot, shooting upward at ROCKET. I includes a superb framing of BUTCH's new sign.

BRADY MICHAELS (CONT'D)

Ready?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm ready.

BRADY counts down with his hands, four fingers and a thumb, four fingers, three fingers, two fingers, the index, then he gives a thumbs up.

BRADY MICHAELS

ROCKET, You are promoting your upcoming film debut of *BOOTLICKER* with an image of the mayor of St. Louis, with the Gateway Arch in his hand like a whip, and a Black man cowering on his knees. What do you want people to take from that?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Whatever they draw from the presented documentation is what I want them to take away.

BRADY MICHAELS

What is your take then?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I personally feel that St. Louis, under this administration, is run like a big plantation. And, it's not just the mayor who perpetuates this condition. To me, the culpability is equally shared by many of the so-called Black "leaders" in this region. We call them *BOOTLICKERS*. Hence the name of the film.

BRADY MICHAELS

So this movie is about Black leadership -

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Or the lack thereof.

BRADY MICHAELS

I see. Was it your intention for the timing of this film to coincide with the upcoming primary election that the mayor is engaged in.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I'm releasing the movie now because this is when I finished it. If the timing is an inconvenience to the mayor, then that's unfortunate.

BRADY MICHAELS

Do you have a particular audience in mind for the film.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Yes. Everyone. This film can provide a perspective for all of us to take something from. It speaks for itself, and people can draw their own conclusions.

BRADY cuts the roll. He resets the camera focused on him.

BRADY MICHAELS

This is BRADY MICHAELS, *Acton News* 4. Back to you, DANA.

BRADY stops recording.

BRADY MICHAELS (CONT'D)

Thank you, ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I thank you.

BRADY MICHAELS

Is it okay for me to follow-up with an interview the night of the show?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Absolutely!

BRADY MICHAELS

Great. This will run at 6pm and 10pm toninght. I'll see you on October 3.

The two shake hands.

BRADY MICHAELS (CONT'D)

Good luck!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thanks!

BRADY packs his equipment away as ROCKET walks into B & L.

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ROCKET sits on the couch with his laptop on the coffee table.
LISA's image is on the Skype window.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Tomorrow, I'm supposed to turn over
twelve hundred dollars to the
Tivoli. I also have to pay two-
hundred fifty to Allied Insurance
by October 1st.

LISA

Can't you call around and borrow
it? You have so many people that
love what you're doing?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

The people that are most passionate
about what I'm doing don't have
anything. That's why they are moved
in such a way by this truth. It
represents hope for them.

LISA

Can you ask for an extension?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

The contract is clear, LISA. Submit
payment by noon on September 25th
or lose the space and deposit.

LISA

I don't know what to say, baby.
You've worked so hard. Your
adversaries just seem unbeatable.
They have a lock on so many levels.
Even the state. If this were two
weeks later, I could put up the
money for you, baby. Some of us new
teachers are borrowing from each
other and family at home to make it
until our first payday. I'm so
sorry for you, ROWAN.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

It will be all right, doll. This
will just have to wait. It happens.

LISA

I love you. I'm getting ready to shower for work, baby.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Oh yeah. It's 6am there while it's 8pm here. I have to get used to this.

LISA

Yes you do. I love you, ROWAN.

LISA blows a kiss.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Love you too, doll.

ROCKET kissed back.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Bye, love.

LISA

Bye, baby.

They disconnect.

ROCKET closes down his computer. He stands up and walks over to his computer bag to place the laptop in. His cellphone rings. ROCKET picks up the cellphone from the coffee table. The I.D. Reads: *MARVIN SMITH*. ROCKET presses talk and speaker.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

This is ROCKET.

MARVIN SMITH

ROCKET, ROCKET, ROCKET. I saw your interview. You were great!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

I owe my deliberate and dispassionate approach to you, MARVIN. How have you been?

MARVIN SMITH

Oh, pretty good for a seventy-eight-year-old guy with a forty-five-year old girlfriend.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Good grief! You're as bad as WILLIE.

MARVIN SMITH

Who is that?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Never mind.

MARVIN SMITH

I just wanted to let you know that I love your paper and the work that you're doing. It wasn't right for *Center Stage*, but it's great and very important.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thank you, MARVIN. Coming from you, my most learned mentor, that means everything.

MARVIN SMITH

Becky, my forty-five-year-old chick, and I will be coming to see the film on October 3.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

You'll have to wait, MARVIN. I have to reschedule to date.

MARVIN SMITH

Why?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

It's a very long story, with LISA in Abu Dhabi, state payment freezes, and all kinds of twists and turns -

MARVIN SMITH

ROCKET, your film precedes the primary election. It could do very well for you, and give you time to book follow-up premiers leading up to the election. You can't lose this opportunity.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

MARVIN, LISA makes much more money now, I'm going to start looking at other opportunities. There's no guarantee that the film would get a large enough audience to warrant any follow-ups. I'm fine with waiting and getting out of this constant money crunch and the threats to our livelihood.

MARVIN SMITH

I guess I understand that. Fighting this system of bullshit can be a drain. Listen, keep in touch with me. Maybe there will be something that we can do together in the future.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Will do.

MARVIN SMITH

Give LISA my love.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Okay, Marvin. Good-bye.

MARVIN SMITH

Good-bye.

They disconnect. ROCKET heads to the bedroom.

EXT. STARBUCKS - MORNING

ROCKET sits at a patio table with a green mint tea, reading the *Daily-Chronicle*. He looks at the time display on his cellphone. It reads: 11:07 am. He punches in a phone number, presses talk, speaker, and sets it on the table. The phone rings.

ATTENDANT (V.O.)

Tivoli Theatre, Dale speaking. How may I help you.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Dale, please connect me to ADAM in sales.

ATTENDANT (V.O.)

Hold please.

ADAM V.O.

This is ADAM.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

ADAM, this is ROCKET. I'll have to cancel the showing on October 3 -

ADAM

I don't understand. You pay the balance this morning and have to cancel an hour and a half later?

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What are you talking about.

ADAM
What do you mean? Your man, Mr. Smith, said that you sent him to deliver your balance.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
(softly)
MARVIN... Okay. That's okay.
Everything is good, ADAM.

ADAM
Are you sure.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I'm sure. What time can I get into the theatre on October 3?

ADAM
Anytime after 4pm.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Great! Thanks. I'll see you then.

They disconnect.

CUT TO:

EXT. TIVOLI THEATRE - AFTERNOON

It's 4:04 pm, October 3, and ROCKET stands outside of the theatre taking photos of the main marquee that reads: *BOOTLICKER*. He takes video of cars and pedestrians passing by under the marquee. He also takes pictures of two young White girls, a BLONDE and a RED-HEAD, college student types, that are at the box office to purchase *BOOTLICKER* tickets.

BLONDE
We've got a number of friends from Washington University that are intending to come.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
That's great, ladies. Please keep spreading the word.

RED-HEAD
We will. See in a couple of hours.

The girls leave. ROCKET steps into the great foyer of the Tivoli Theatre.

INT. TIVOLI THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

The foyer still has its *Roaring Twenties* motif, with memorabilia from those days gone by. On his left shoulder is his camera bag. In his left hand he has a large *Party City* bag. Under his right arm he has a 24 inch wide by 36 inch tall blown up replica of his *BOOTLICKER* flyer.

ROCKET places the poster on an easel near the theatre's main lobby doors. He take a large, red rolled material from the *Party City* bag. He proceeds to roll out the material which is actually a long makeshift red carpet for guest to walk on when they arrive. The carpet leads directly to the easel with the poster. ROCKET sits on a perch in the corner of the lobby with his camera and awaits his guests.

INT. TIVOLI THEATRE NUMBER TWO - LATER

ROCKET walks down the aisle of the crowded theatre at 6:50. The crowd is roughly forty-five percent White or other and fifty-five percent Black.

ROCKET passes WILLIE, sitting to his left next to a lovely Asian girl. He taps WILLIE on his shoulder and leans over towards him.

WILLIE COLEMAN
(whispering)
WIFEY number 12.

Out of the girl's sight ROCKET rolls his eyes. As he approaches the front of the theatre, he passes MARVIN SMITH, who is about to sit down with his noticeably young companion.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
MARVIN!

ROCKET hugs him.

MARVIN SMITH
ROCKET, ROCKET, ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
I can't thank you enough.

MARVIN SMITH
Don't mention it. This is my
girlfriend, BECKY.

ROCKET extends his hand to BECKY, and shakes her hand gently.

BECKY

Hello ROCKET, I've heard a lot about you and your great work.

MARVIN SMITH

Don't let us hold you. Go welcome your guest. This is great!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Okay.

ROCKET continues down the aisle at the front of the theatre. He picks up a cordless microphone that is set on the floor of a small stage in front of the screen. He presses the small button to the on position.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

(inaudible)

Check, one, two. Check, one, two...

He looks at the microphone. There a loud pop from the speakers in the theatre. Some of the moviegoers cover their ears. People are still filing into seats and down the aisles.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

Is this thing on. Yes! Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I welcome you to my premier tonight.

The crowd claps.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

I've been informed that

He pauses and looks up somberly.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

(suddenly excitedly)

BOOTLICKER is a sell-out!

The crowd roars in cheer.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

No pun intended.

There's much laughter throughout the theatre.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)

I hope that you enjoy, are enriched, and or enlightened by this work.

He looks at his cellphone. It reads 7:01.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
Without further ado. Ladies and
Gentlemen, *BOOTLICKER*.

The theatre lights go down and the film opens to a soft jazz
tune under the opening credits. The title: WILLIE COLEMAN
appears on the screen, credited with sound and grips.

WILLIE COLEMAN
(boisterously)
Hell yeah!

The audience claps and laughs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TIVOLI THEATRE MAIN LOBBY - NIGHT

People are pouring out of the theatre through the narrow hall
and the main lobby. ROCKET is near the front door shaking
hands with departing guests. BRADY MICHAELS of *Action News 4*
is standing by with a microphone near ROCKET. His camera man
is at their profile.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Thank you all, so much.

The ELDERLY man shakes ROCKETS hand. His GRANDSON is walking
next to him

ELDERLY
Beautiful job, young man. This is
your niche.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Thank you, sir, for coming, and for
supporting my work.

ADAM from Tivoli Theatre sales approaches ROCKET.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL (CONT'D)
With a sold out theatre, I'm
definitely going to want to book
more dates in the weeks to come.

ADAM
Just give me a call tomorrow, and
we'll work out some dates.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
Okay. Thank you.

ROCKET continues shaking hands and bidding guests good night.

CUT TO:

INT. ROCKET AND LISA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ROCKET sits on the sofa with his laptop on the coffee table.
LISA is on the Skype screen.

LISA

Oh baby, I'm so proud of you.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thank you, baby. It was incredible.

LISA

I saw the *Action News 4* report on my Facebook feed: *BOOTLICKER is a Sell-Out! Classic!* My colleagues here think that I'm married to a celebrity.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Not yet, baby. Let's see if we can ride the wave of interest to some real opportunity at last. I have to call ADAM in Tivoli Theatre sales tomorrow.

LISA

Yes, darling. Get some rest. You have to be exhausted. I'm off to a shower and work. I love you, Boo. Great job!

ROCKET ROWAN BELL

Thank you, doll. Love you too. Good night, baby.

LISA

Good night.

They disconnect.

CUT TO:

EXT. STARBUCKS - MORNING

ROCKET sits at a patio table, sipping green mint tea, and reading a *Daily-Chronicle*. He takes out his cellphone, punches in a number, presses speaker, and sets it on the table. The phone rings.

ADAM V.O.
Tivoli Theatre, this is ADAM.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
ADAM, this is ROCKET. I want to
talk about dates for the next two
weeks.

ADAM V.O.
ROCKET, I'm sorry, but the Tivoli
won't be available to show anymore
of your films.

ROCKET looks stunned.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What? Why? What are you talking
about?

ADAM V.O.
We are a private theatre group and
we reserve the right to refuse
business to any individual or
company.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
What, wait -

ADAM V.O.
It's on the contract, ROCKET. I'm
sorry.

ROCKET ROWAN BELL
No, man -

ADAM V.O.
We wish you luck and success with
your film. Good-bye, sir.

ADAM disconnects. ROCKET sits. His tea cup and the newspaper
flutter from the trembling of his hands. His face contorts
with pain. His eyes don't cry.

DISSOLVE:

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI ST. LOUIS, CLARK HALL - DAY

ROCKET sits at a desk at the back right corner of room 215.
The students, male, female, White, Black, Asian, Hispanic,
others, look at the smart-board at the front of the
classroom. The professor sits on a high stool behind a
computer station and control center.

PROFESSOR (V.O.)

The Illusion of choice. These six corporations control 90% of the media in America. This narrowing of choices removes the full spectrum of views and information with which to choose government...

ROCKET diligently takes notes.

FADE TO BLACK